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AND MRS. FAULCONBRIDGE.

MR. AND MRS. FAULCONBRIDGE.

MR. & MRS. FAULCONBRIDGE.

BY

HAMILTON AÏDÉ,

AUTHOR OF "RITA," "CONFIDENCES," "CARR OF CARRLYON,"
ETC. ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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BIBLIOTHECA · BODLEIANA ·

THE Author fears that the interest of the following story will depend, (with such readers as do not care for sketches, more or less careful, of character), on the preservation of a secret affecting the mutual relations of some of the persons in it. He is emboldened, therefore, by the example of Mr. Wilkie Collins—that master in the art of telling a story—to prefer a request to such critics as may do him the honour to review this novel. It is, that, while awarding praise or blame, they do not deem it necessary to "open the proceedings by telling the story at second-hand."

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MR. AND MRS. FAULCONBRIDGE.

CHAPTER I.

GOING ON THE STAGE.

LATE one afternoon in March, in the year 1857, two persons sat in a small second-floor apartment in the neighbourhood of Golden Square.

The aspect of the house, and the first glance round the room, bespoke poverty. But, on closer examination, certain details might be observed, having an air of luxury, particularly when contrasted with the dinginess of the furniture and the narrowness of the grate. A variety of books, a few bound in vellum, others in the ill-stitched

paper wrappers that bespeak a foreign origin, covered the table and the sofa. A meerschaum pipe mounted in silver, and an ebony casket of the *cinque cento*, now converted into a work-box, were also on the table; and the work beside it was not "plain work," but costly, in satin and silver.

The most luxurious articles in the room, however, if the term be held to mean things rare, and pleasurable to the eye, were the inhabitants themselves.

Before the fire, his chair tilted at an angle of forty-five degrees, and his feet on the hob, sat a young man of very remarkable beauty. He was tall and slight, and his complexion unusually dark for an Englishman. This, probably, aided by a dark moustache, made him look older than he really was. He might have passed for six-and-twenty, but was, in reality, some three or four years younger. It was a face susceptible of very varying expressions: the eyes fired up, or softened, in an instant; the mouth, under different aspects, was not like the same feature. But through every

phase, a tenacity of pursuit, whether in thought or passion, was its chief characteristic, and written in lines which those who ran might read. At this moment it was somewhat sullen: the lips tight-clenched, the brows drawn down close as a hood over the deep, steady light of the eyes. The dark hair rose from the low broad brow in stubborn waves that would not submit to trim fashions. He had no neckcloth on, and the gold link which should have held his collar together was unfastened, showing how the throat rose like a shaft of polished brown marble, erect and massive, and inclining slightly outwards behind the ear, where the organ of combativeness was largely developed.

While the young man sits gazing at the embers, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and the afternoon fog gathers thicker each moment round the window, let us turn to the other occupant of the chamber.

A young woman is working near that window, and a happier contrast to her companion, in outward appearance, could hardly be found. She is

rather under the middle height, and her hair is of that rare warm gold which sometimes meets with opprobrium in this country, but which the old Italians, at least, appreciated, and loved to paint. It is accompanied, as usual, by a complexion of exquisite fairness. Her soft, fawn-like eyes, her sweet, shy way of looking up every now and then, are surely very attractive. A plain black gown, without ornament; a plain black net, into which the ropes of her rich hair are gathered,—this is her dress. The only expression her face wears at this moment is that of intentness upon the work she has in hand. She glances up at her companion from time to time, but no word has passed between them for the last hour. Her fingers ply their task; the rich white satin and silver will soon be transformed into a petticoat, for the last seam is now being finished. Strangely out of keeping with that dingy room this costly work appears. The clock strikes five.

"No letter!" said the young man, kicking at the hollow, dusty little fire with his foot. "No letter. Confound it!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when a low, fluttering knock was heard at the door: and at his invitation to "come in," the maid-of-all-work, a female who might be said to be painted in drabs throughout, entered, and laid a letter on the table.

"Missis says as she forgot it this mornin', sir; and, if you please, sir, to pay your bill as is due a Monday last."

I think it well the "missis"—being of a nervous temperament—was not at hand to receive her lodger's reply in person. I doubt whether it was transmitted through the drab maid with anything like the force of the original.

But the perusal of the letter acted speedily as a sedative to the young man's irritation. He tossed it by with a smile—not altogether a pleasant one, perhaps,—and, with the simple ejaculation, "All right, Nina," he drew his writing-materials towards him. The lady did not seem to derive as much satisfaction from this as might be expected. She gave an anxious look towards her companion, and sighed; but she said nothing, and the next minute

she bent her head down again to finish her task in the waning light. Two or three letters, and the draughts of replies written to them, lay open upon the table before the young man. We will take the liberty of reading two of these as the shortest way of arriving at some knowledge of his position. He first glances over one received eight days ago, the handwriting of which is thick and stumpy, but firm as a rock, and very legible. It is dated "Stourton Towers, March 20."

"My dear Faulconbridge,

"Your letter was only forwarded to me from my club yesterday. I was very glad to hear of you again, and to find you are in England. I assure you I retain a pleasant recollection of the time we passed together at Bonn four years ago, and am glad to renew our intercourse, so long interrupted. You ask for my advice and assistance—the first, a cheap article; the last, not much more valuable, I am afraid: but you shall have both. So you think seriously of going on the stage? I remember you had always a han-

kering after it. I do not forget how admirably you used to read Shakspeare in our small German society, and even caught the inspiration of Schiller in a wonderful way for a foreigner. But, to come to the prosaic question of money, perhaps you are not aware how ill-paid a profession is that of the stage in England? Nothing but the most extraordinary gift raises its possessor into a position to demand such salaries as you have heard of in Paris and Vienna. It will not do to be first among the second-rates. Nothing short of rare genius will enable you to overstep all the petty annoyances, the drudgeries, the indignities, the contact with vulgar-minded managers—all the irritations, in short, to which you will be exposed. Now, unless four years have very much changed you, you are not calculated to stand all this with equanimity. Unless you feel it a positive necessity that you should go on the stage—that it is the only career you can pursue with ardour, turn your thoughts, I say, in some other direction. You have first-rate abilities; and you have indomitable energy. I believe you might distinguish

yourself in many professions, and certainly make a larger income than you are likely to do by acting. You see I am a lawyer, and look at these questions in a hard-headed way. You tell me you are poor. You hint at some tie, or encumbrance, that necessitates your getting employment without loss of time. I refer to this, not from curiosity to probe your secrets, but merely to point out that under these circumstances, you certainly might find a more lucrative calling than the stage. With your classical knowledge, and thorough acquaintance with modern languages, it is hard if something cannot be got for you. Would you take a colonial appointment? I would try what I can do for you in that line; but I must know distinctly beforehand what you would accept.

"I am here with my father's old friend, Sir Richard Stourton, for a fortnight, after which I return to town. Sincerely yours,

"BRADLEY FERRERS.

A copy of the answer sent to this letter lay on the table beside it.

"*March* 21.

"My dear Ferrers,

"I am very glad you have not forgotten a chance friendship made four years ago. Considering our very different circumstances, and the privilege of a short memory, which half the world enjoys, it would not have surprised me. Let me thank you, therefore, for your cordial letter, with its advice and offers of assistance. Could I discuss my plans with you *de vive voix*, I could better explain to you the difficulties in my arriving at any other decision than the one I have announced. Is there any inn near Stourton Towers where I could come down for a night or two, as you will not be in London for some time? I remember well your mentioning that fine old place. I should not, of course, think of intruding upon Sir Richard Stourton; but if I could have a few hours' conversation with you while you are his guest, I should be glad. I would run down by the mail-train as soon as I receive your answer.

"I am, dear Ferrers, truly yours,

"Edgar Faulconbridge."

Three days later, Bradley Ferrers had written again.

"My dear Faulconbridge,

"I shall have business next week which will oblige me, I think, to run up to town for a day. I shall make a point then of seeing you. I should be sorry you had the trouble and expense of making the journey down here, solely for the purpose of seeing me.

"Were you acquainted with Sir Richard, your assistance, however, would be invaluable in the house just now, which is in great excitement about some public theatricals which George Stourton is getting up in aid of the funds of the County Hospital. Some of his brother-officers are here, and a few sporting men—none of them much in my line; and very little else is talked of but acting and shooting, but there seems to be a difficulty about ladies. . . . . .

"I was interrupted by Sir Richard, who sent for me. I could hardly help laughing when he announced the object of this summons; and, curious

to say, *you* are the only person I can think of to apply to in Sir Richard's dilemma. Let me explain the case. George is not yet three-and-twenty, but his uncle is already anxious that he should be married. This nephew and heir is the centre of all his thoughts and hopes; and every whim of the young gentleman's is indulged, down to these plays, which are not at all in Sir Richard's line. The subject of the *ladies* to act has been one of anxious discussion. The uncle lives in dread of the nephew's making a *mésalliance*. There are one or two pretty girls in the county, who are said to be good actresses, but Sir Richard will not hear of them. Those 'eligible' ones whom he proposes, on the other hand—such as Lady Katherine Power, Miss Lichfield, and others—George absolutely declines. Thus it has come to pass that they have announced their play, the *Lady of Lyons*, for next Wednesday week, and that they have no actress to take the principal part! Two middle-aged ladies have consented to take the minor characters, but a suitable 'Pauline' cannot be found. George is a tremendous young

autocrat in his way, and he and Sir Richard have had a regular fight about it. He has now, as a last resource, proposed to his uncle to get down a professional actress from London to fill this important part, and Sir Richard does not object. He makes a stipulation, however, that she shall be a married woman, and, I need not add, of undoubted respectability. How this mixture of amateurs and professionals will answer, is, I think, very doubtful; however, that is no affair of mine. What I am asked to do is, to get any competent friend of mine to select some really lady-like actress, and propose to her to come down here for a week. She might make her own terms, I fancy; and she would be treated in every respect as a *guest*. It is just possible that you may know such a person, if you are thrown at all into theatrical circles. Will you make inquiries, and let me have an answer as soon as possible?

"Ever sincerely yours,

"BRADLEY FERRERS."

Here was the reply, dated the next day, the 26th:—

"My dear Ferrers,—

"I must begin this letter by making a confession to you. I am no longer alone in the world. I have now another to struggle, perhaps to starve, for. I do not expect from you the useless jargon about an improvident marriage, or I should keep my own counsel for the present. When you see my Nina, perhaps you will understand my committing what the world calls 'a folly.' But to the point of my letter. Mrs. Faulconbridge is going to share my theatrical career. She has great dramatic feeling, and has studied for some time with a view to appearing in public. I hope I am not too sanguine in anticipating for her a great success. You will now understand one of my chief reasons for selecting a profession where I shall be my wife's protection and support; for her desire to go upon the stage is so strong that I should find it difficult to oppose her in our present circumstances. Having told you this, you will surely guess what I have to propose. If you think Mrs. Faulconbridge is likely to be fitted for the purpose, she would be happy to accept Sir Richard Stourton's terms, whatever they

may be, for a theatrical engagement. Let it be made entirely a matter of business. I do not desire that she should be considered as your friend's wife, or otherwise than as a *hired actress*. As there is probably an inn somewhere near at hand (you do not answer me on that point) I should accompany Mrs. Faulconbridge, and she could attend the rehearsals from there, as I should not think of intruding upon Sir Richard's hospitalities.

"I am, dear Ferrers,

"Yours faithfully and obliged,

"EDGAR FAULCONBRIDGE."

It was the answer to this letter, so eagerly waited for, and so needlessly delayed in delivery until within half an hour of post-time, which Faulconbridge had just read. He sat considering it for some minutes, then, after reverting to the former correspondence, he seized a pen, and wrote in haste the following lines :—

"Sir Richard Stourton is really much too good to invite me to his house, my dear Ferrers. I am

overcome by this act of generous condescension to a poor player, for which I am indebted, of course, to your friendly offices. But though tempted to decline the invitation, I think it better, on the whole, to accept it, and to try and conduct myself so as not to disgrace you in this noble society. You say I shall be of use in superintending these plays, and that you can see more of me than you could if I were at the inn. This decides me. You may expect us, therefore, both on Wednesday. Your suggestion of our having an old tower to ourselves I highly approve. You know I am often an unsociable beast; that I used to walk up and down my room at night, and get up at unearthly hours in the morning, when we were at Bonn; and as these habits disturb my wife, I wish, wherever we are in the house, to have a separate den. But I should greatly prefer the old tower, in spite of rats or creaking floors, to any other part, if you can get us there. I will bring down the play-books, and order the dresses from Nathan's, you ask for.

"We shall leave London by the mail train,

reaching Stourbridge, I see, in the afternoon. I will thank you to order a fly to meet us.

"In haste, yours, as ever,

"E. F."

Having finished and thrust this into an envelope, directed it in an impetuous, somewhat illegible hand, and fastened on a postage-stamp topsy-turvy, Edgar Faulconbridge rose, pulled the bell, and then, suddenly changing his mind, seized his hat, exclaiming,

"No—I'll take it myself. They'll forget it, ten to one. Nina," he continued, going up to his wife, and taking her fair head between his hands, so that he could look down into her clear brown eyes, "we are beginning life in earnest now—the great struggle that requires all our wits. Do you trust me? Are you willing to do all I tell you, without murmur, without hesitation?"

"Have I ever hesitated to do as you told me, Edgar?" said the young woman, gently. "I will do so now, if you tell me it *must* be so. But oh! is it necessary that we should go to

this great house? I do so hate the idea of it! I know you will be miserable there, and so shall I."

He stopped her with a kiss.

"Never mind if we are, it will only last for a week. You know how I love you—how I would sacrifice every wish of my own for your sake. Well, I would not do this thing if it were not very important—nay, *necessary* for many reasons I cannot explain to you now. Only trust me. I have a duty to perform," he added, with knit brows, "and the means of performing it has now been put into my hands."

An expression of pain passed over the fair young face before him; but she said no more. He glanced down at her dress; then drew from his pocket a well-worn leather purse.

"Here," he continued, shaking out three five-pound notes, "the last left! One will just cover our bill here, and half of another must be kept for our journey. Remains only seven pound ten, *Nina mia!* Yet, somehow or other, your wardrobe must be restocked. That stage

attire cost what is a fortune, in the present state of our finances; but it was essential: and it is equally essential that we should not appear as beggars at Stourton Towers. Have we anything we can pawn?"

Mrs. Faulconbridge shook her head.

"Nevertheless, my darling shall be nicely dressed. She must have a white bonnet, such as she used to wear in Italy, and a soft black dress for the evening—gauze or crape, or something. Come!—nothing like putting a bold face upon it. Run and get your bonnet. Messrs. Jay won't refuse to send a box of things down to Mrs. Faulconbridge, at Sir Richard Stourton's, Baronet, of Stourton Towers—eh?"

The young wife cast a frightened glance at her husband, then turned her face towards the window. In contact with her husband's inflexible will, she was powerless as a bird flapping its wings against the wires of its cage. She rose, lifted her soft, downy young cheek to be kissed, and passed, without a word, into the adjoining room to fetch her bonnet.

Five minutes later, the young couple hurried out into the London fog, threading the gloomy by-ways of that neighbourhood, till they came out suddenly upon the glittering gas-lit shops of Regent Street.

A box addressed to Mrs. Faulconbridge at Stourton Towers was sent down by the same train which took her and her husband three days later. Thus it came to pass that the lady was clothed in purple and fine linen immediately after her arrival.

CHAPTER II.

LADY TREVELYAN.

Two young men with guns on their shoulders, followed by a couple of pointers, were crossing one of the long, straight alleys that are cut fan-wise through the woods round Stourton Towers, that same Wednesday morning.

There was nothing about either of them requiring us to linger over first introduction to these young men with pre-Raphaelite detail. It is a matter of little importance to this history whether they were tall, fair, dark, short, "bearded like the pard," or "rose-cheek'd" as Adonis. Their names were Etheridge and Wilmot; and both were in the army. Etheridge was in the same battalion of the Guards to which George Stourton had belonged, until he exchanged, six

months ago, into the —th Light Dragoons. In this latter regiment young Wilmot was a cornet; a good-natured boy, generally occupied in feeling for a moustache which would not come, and given to a universal admiration for the fair sex. His companion was a very fine gentleman, of the sort who delight in appearing infinitely more selfish and silly than they probably are in reality.

Etheridge was languidly complaining that rabbit-shooting was only fit for boys, and that he really wondered at himself for taking the trouble to come out with such an object, after shooting the best coverts in England all the winter,—when they reached the cross-alley I have spoken of. At the farther end of it, a lady, in a long grey garden-cloak, was walking.

"There's Lady Trevelyan," said Wilmot. "What a stunning woman that is! But I always feel deucid shy when I talk to her. I can't tell why. Do you know what I mean, Etheridge?"

"No; I can't say that I do—never did with a woman in my life. Besides, the widow ain't in

my style. Those big women, with large eyes, who are always on the high ropes, are so fatiguing, I think. You're young, and haven't had a *grande passion* yet—take care of yourself, Willy, my boy."

"Stuff!" said the cornet, nettled at not being treated as a *blasé* man of the world. "I am not likely to make a fool of myself with a woman old enough to—to—be my aunt."

"Such young aunts are very dangerous sometimes," laughed the guardsman. "Twelve years' difference, or so, with a pretty jointure of three thousand a year,—you might do worse for yourself, perhaps. Consider over it. Only I don't think you've much chance, and it's a bore being refused. At least, I should think so. Can't say I ever tried, myself."

"Is she a great swell in London, Etheridge? I suppose fellows run after her a great deal?"

"Never saw her there. Probably she has come up for a few weeks every year, and done a drawing-room, and a court-ball, and dined with a set of dull, country fogies—but that isn't society. Respectable old lords like her late husband, who are

big-wigs in the country, are generally nobodies in town. We can't admit every one, you know. The thing is impossible."

Wilmot treated the information as though he were perfectly conversant with the laws that govern London society, though he had never been above fifteen days there at a time: and the greater part of these had been spent at the "Rag and Famish," or in Rotten Row. He returned gallantly to the defence of Lady Trevelyan's charms, however, after a moment.

"Well, I must say she is a clipper! What a way she has of entering a room! She bowls me regularly over when she comes in dressed for dinner, with a breath like violets, and such a neck and shoulders! Then that voice and manner of hers—by Jove! she looks like a duchess"

"Do you mean that as a compliment? You wouldn't if you were as much used to them as I am, my dear fellow. Nine-tenths of them are not remarkable for the dignity of their demeanour."

"Oh! you're so confoundedly matter-of-fact.

I mean that she's one's idea of a duchess. She does the honours of the house so capitally. Sir Richard is deucid lucky to have such a niece, to give an air of respectability to his bachelor establishment. Does she always live here?"

"No; she has a small place of her own somewhere in Cornwall, I fancy; but she is here a great deal. Since her husband's death, she has always spent several months in every year with her uncle. Wise woman!—knows when she's in good quarters."

"Now that's a shame!" cried her champion. "It can't be much amusement, I'm sure, being here alone with that pompous old bloke, when George is away, and there isn't anybody here."

"Sir Richard is only here himself for a certain time—just the shooting season, and a few weeks in the summer, when the house is generally full. This winter he has stayed on until now on account of George's leave. It ain't half a bad house to stay in, let me tell you. Capital French cook; and that 'thirty-four' claret last night was really remarkable.

"Stunning!" observed the cornet, anxious not to be behindhand as a connoisseur,—"but women know nothing of wine."

"Depend on it, Lady Trevelyan is a wise woman: knows what she is about. She likes playing first fiddle, and does here pretty much what she likes. If she *is* a little bored with the old gentleman, why, she was broken into that by ten years with her late lord."

"Wasn't Sir Richard a very loose fish in his day? I have heard that he led an awful life at one time."

"I believe he was not a model of virtue."

"Fancy that cold, stately old chap, with those endless folds of choker round his neck, ever having been wild! Upon my soul! the idea is quite ghastly!"

"Then don't dwell on it," drawled the ex-Guardsman, "when there are so many pleasanter things to think of."

"I wonder Lady Trevelyan, a fine woman not much past thirty, shouldn't have been afraid of taking up her abode with such a disreputable old

dog—surrounded, as I suppose he often is, with a set of men like that old Carton. How I hate the little brute!"

"Lady Trevelyan is one of those dragons of virtue whom the world never ventures to breathe about. Very unnatural, *I* think. So unfeminine."

"What? The virtue?" laughed Wilmot. "It must be neuter, then, for it certainly is not masculine. I wonder where George is! Wasn't he to meet us?"

"He said he would if he could. Busy at the theatre, I believe. What a confounded bore these plays are."

"Why do you act, then?"

"Oh, simply to oblige George."

"Do you know your part?"

"I haven't the faintest idea of it. I never could learn anything, even at school; and now it is really much too great a bore. I shall trust to Providence and the prompter."

"I should think you'd much better leave it alone altogether," the cornet hastened to say.

"There is one of those fellows who are coming to-morrow who would take the part. If you can't learn it, don't spoil the play."

"I can't disappoint my admiring friends. I shall pull through somehow or other—you'll see."

"Well, but as we have got two or three scenes together, it will be deucid disagreeable for me. These actor-people come to-day; and there is to be a rehearsal—a regular one, I mean—the day after to-morrow."

"They come to-day, do they?" said Etheridge, evading the personal question suggested by his companion's remark. "Well, I hope the woman is decent-looking, as I have to make fierce love to her in one scene."

"At all events, she'll be more lively than Lady Katherine Power, whom Sir Richard wanted to take the part. What a mull she would have made of it!"

It might have been observed that Etheridge winced a little; but he replied more languidly, if possible, than before.

"'Comparisons are odorous,' my dear fellow, as

the poet has remarked. Never talk of any woman in decent society in the same breath with a—people of this sort—professionals. It don't do."

"Why, he is a friend of Ferrers," replied Wilmot, quickly; "and *he* says that this—Falconer, what is his name?—is a perfect gentleman. No end of a clever fellow, who could do anything, if he chose—only he has gone mad about acting. Ferrers doesn't know the wife, but he says that any woman this Falcon—what's his name?—married is sure to be a lady, so you needn't be so very contemptuous about them, Etheridge."

"I assure you I was all for having them. The sort of thing is new, and, I daresay, will be amusing. The man, too, if he knows anything about his business, will tell one what to do. As to his wife's being a *lady* or not, we shall see. People's ideas differ so much about the term; but I daresay she will be very good fun."

The lady who had first occupied so large a share of the young men's conversation continued her walk meanwhile down the avenue of bare beech trees, whose grey trunks shone like silver

in the clear spring-morning sun. Their delicate branches met above her head without excluding its rays; their tracery of pale blue shadow fell upon the gravel at her feet; while round their boles, and between the tawny spikes of last year's fern, nestled primroses and violets, and all the tender green of early spring, struggling upwards to the light. The rooks cawing gravely from their lofty homes in the park below, or as they wheeled round the old grey towers of Stourton; a rabbit or a squirrel scudding across the path, and in among the crisp dead leaves on either side; the song of a blackbird chanting the completion of her nest—these were the only sounds to disturb the lady's thoughts. She had escaped for a while from the restraint of a large house-full of visitors. She had come here to breathe the pure air of Nature, in peace and solitude.

She reached the end of the long alley, and leant for some time upon the strip of marble balustrade which separates this walk from a precipitous descent, tangled with hawthorns, into the deer-park. Another walk crosses it here, at right

angles, following the course of this natural terrace which overlooks a great portion of the demesne. But all these walks, as Lady Trevelyan knew, were deserted now. The stables, the croquet-ground, the gardens and conservatories, were more attractive to most people.

She leant over the wall; but it may be doubted whether her thoughts followed her eyes, as they wandered over that fair expanse of hill, and wood, and water. They were very possibly far away, and had gone back to distant days, slowly and thoughtfully retreading the years that had intervened, as she stood there.

A woman builds a shrine for her first love: a man makes a bonfire of it. It is not always with enduring regret that the woman approaches this shrine, which holds what she so dearly prized while it lived. She may be a happy mother, well-contented with her lot; still there are moments when the memory of that time returns strongly, separated as it is from all her present life. Like certain perfumes and melodies, its associations never lose all their sweetness and tenderness for

her. A man, from the ashes of his bonfire, rakes up, perhaps, in time, the steady-burning flame of a less-passionate love, and can discuss calmly the merits of that immolated fair one. A woman cannot talk of these things; but unless her lot be unusually happy, she will often unlock that shrine, and take from it the pleasant memories of the past. It is in the nature of things — man to march resolutely on; woman, like Lot's wife, to linger and look backwards.

Lady Trevelyan's life had not been a remarkable one. It was the old story: a girl's love at eighteen, and the worldly, common-sense marriage at one-and-twenty. Her father urged it—he was a poor man; her mother urged it—she was a gentle, affectionate woman, but with an inordinate idea of the value of rank, and the miseries of poverty. She was hopelessly ill at this time, and she had felt very much her daughter's first engagement having been broken off. She conceived it essential that Diana should marry early, and here was Lord Trevelyan, an excellent man against whom the world had never breathed a

word, and an excellent *parti* in every respect, except that of age. Diana was indifferent to everything: but when she saw how visibly her rejection of Lord Trevelyan affected her mother's health—how she pined and fretted from day to day—the girl relented. She told Lord Trevelyan the exact truth; and married him.

The ten years of her married life had been peaceful, if not what those who looked below the surface could call "happy." Lord Trevelyan was fifty. He had fair abilities in the routine of daily life, without a grain of imagination, and not very sensitive feelings. Had he possessed such, he could not have married as he did. Their absence he regarded, perhaps rightly, as a great blessing. With no children, it was not surprising that they had but few sympathies in common. Yet, on her side, at least, this was never allowed to appear. His dogs and horses, his chemical manures, and covered drains,—she was always ready to listen to everything, and give a proper amount of attention to whatever interested him. True, she lived in a world of her own, into which

he could never enter, and the chance visitants from which spoke a language which he understood not. Fortunately her imagination found its natural vent in a deep and quiet channel, gliding silently through the level plains of a dull life, without injury to her lord. Had she written volumes of burning poetry, he might have felt them as covert insults to his singularly prosaic nature. Had she inflicted operas of her own composition upon him every evening, he might justly have felt aggrieved. She painted in the solitude of her closet; so Lord Trevelyan had nothing to complain of. When she designed a group of angels for a window in their church, he asked her one day, "What on earth she was drawing a lot of naked children for?" On another occasion he inquired if the nimbus round a Virgin's head were a straw hat? But in general he was wisely silent on subjects connected with the fine arts, and tolerant of his wife's inoffensive employment. So the life glided on year after year. His lordship was quite contented, and thought his wife a happy woman. She had never

given him cause for a moment's jealousy. Kind and courteous to all, it was remarked that she had few, if any, intimate friends, of either sex. Naturally secretive as to her own personal thoughts and feelings, and with a considerable share of the Stourton pride, but ennobled and purified in her case by the soil upon which it had fallen, such results might be expected from such a marriage. She had laid down for herself a line of conduct from which she had never swerved, and her manners had formed themselves in accordance to this rule; they were not cold, but there is something more impervious than coldness itself. It is that graceful bearing which is the same to all men, and which, while it is apparently quite natural, rarely, if ever, permits us to look behind its polished screen. The consequence was, as may have been inferred from Etheridge's remarks, that Lady Trevelyan, in spite of great personal attractions, had but few ardent admirers. "The Goddess Diana," as she was called, was too far above the common hunger after such, to take much pains to please. She was simple, kind and graceful in

her manner, and without a touch of coquetry. Women, therefore, admired her more cordially than men. Yet now and then you might find a man for whom that stately grace and quiet, self-contained demeanour had a peculiar charm. Such an one would follow her about with his eyes during a whole evening; and over such, had she so willed it, she might have exercised the most unbounded power.

A word as to her person. She was tall and erect; her head grandly set on her shoulders; the bust, arms, and hands, finely modelled. Her eyes were full, clear, and rather prominent; not like Mr. Hayter's well-known eyes, with tears brimming over, and lashes like brooms ready to sweep them up, but human, all-observant eyes, more intelligent than beautiful. The features were fine, but rather large; the movement of the face was its peculiar charm. The mouth, which in repose was clasped so firmly, opened freely over the brilliant, even teeth, and responded to every emotion without grimace—for she was singularly free from affectation of any kind. A noble

simplicity characterized everything she did: her dress, her speech, her way of moving — it was as simple as possible, but it was unlike other women.

Lady Trevelyan had been a widow three years. Her husband's will, without exhibiting an uxorious dotage, left to her a competent jointure, with a small dower-house in Cornwall. Her father and mother were dead; she had no children, no brother or sister. Her uncle, Sir Richard Stourton, and her first cousin, George, were the only near ties she had in the world.

But she was not one of those who,—

> Startled into thought when youth has flown,
> Read the whole past in that one word—alone!

She had been "alone" since the first spring-days of youth, and now, when its summer was fast waning, she was not "startled into thought," for she had recognized and accepted her solitude during all these years. She was wiser than in those girlish days. She would not have recalled them if she could, though their memory was so

infinitely precious to her: but the experience of life had dispelled the golden halo through which she had then seen everything. He, the hero of those days, had since fallen from the pinnacle whereon her imagination had set him. It was a brief period in his career, during which her loftier nature, girl as she was, had lifted him out of and above himself. He was now a worldly, pleasure-seeking man. She read his name sometimes in the *Morning Post*, on the turf, or in the rabble of London parties. Otherwise, she seldom heard of him: their paths had split wide asunder, and she was glad it was so. She could think of him—undisturbed by any subsequent recollection—as he was in the outstart of life, fired with nobler aspirations. Her love had long since died out: she knew now of what poor clay her idol had been made; but round that central figure her happiest memories of the past were grouped.

Since her widowhood, she had asked herself the question more than once, could there ever be a *second* spring for her? Must she read her

future, like her past, "in that one word—alone?" At four-and-thirty, Lady Trevelyan was not a woman to answer this lightly, either from mock sentimentality on the one hand, or a dread of solitude and self-responsibility on the other. But of the men she saw, few interested her enough for her to regard them otherwise than as dull or pleasant company for the passing hour. One among the guests now assembled at Stourton was, indeed, something more than this. She felt that it rested with herself to determine what influence she should exercise henceforth in the life of Bradley Ferrers. She had seen a great deal of him since her husband's death. He had been constantly at Stourton, and a sincere friendship—so rare between man and woman—had grown up on her side for the plain barrister, while on his, it might be something more. She had the greatest respect for his firm and upright character: she would have applied to him in any difficulty, and taken his advice before that of any man she knew. But she was not in love. Perhaps she was too old now for anything of that sort.

Certain it is, that no one she saw awakened in her the slightest feeling of the kind. You cannot go on treading down flowers energetically—on principle—for so many years, and then expect them to spring up. The conclusion she arrived at was always the same: she would never marry again unless she were in love, and every day removed her farther from the probability of that.

She had left her station at the wall, and walked to the farther end of the alley, when she met the barrister coming towards her.

CHAPTER III.

FAULCONBRIDGE'S FRIEND.

FERRERS was a short man with a large head; ugly beyond question: in age, between thirty and forty. A narrow, bald forehead, keen grey eyes, a heavy mouth and jaw, unsoftened by kindly beard or moustache, were the first points in his face that struck one; the next, producing a more lasting impression, was its shrewdness and kindliness. A man "about town" would see at once that his shooting-coat was old-fashioned, and his trousers not made by Poole; but, with a shabby wide-awake on, and a thick stick in his hand, he yet looked like a gentleman. A shabby and an ugly one, but still a gentleman.

"How is it you are out at this hour?" said the

lady. "I thought you were always busy with business letters, and so on, in the morning."

"I have given myself a holiday for the rest of the day. I have promised to go down to Stourbridge and see after some of George's business at the theatre. He has gone off, as usual, and left half his work to chance—or a friend. Then I have to meet Faulconbridge and his wife at the station. So, altogether, I look upon the day as lost."

"Hardly so, since it is marked by two acts of friendship, and a certain amount of self-denial; for I know it is pain and grief to you to tear yourself away from your beloved deeds and parchments."

"Not at this moment. I knew you were here, and I want five minutes' conversation with you."

Lady Trevelyan felt a momentary uneasiness, but it was instantly dispelled. Bradley Ferrers was not a man to make a false step in the dark——unless driven thereto by some very strong necessity.

"It is about my friend who comes to-day that I want to speak to you. I have not yet had an opportunity of doing so."

"I was very glad my uncle invited them. Of course, it was at George's suggestion, and he had some difficulty in getting him to do it; but it was so much better, in every way, than their being at the inn."

"Well, I don't know about that—I am not so sure. I can't help being afraid that there will be a certain awkwardness in their position here—she in a professional capacity, and he as an invited guest. I shouldn't think so with everybody; but Faulconbridge is peculiar, and in this house especially I can't help fearing he may not feel at his ease."

"But, my dear Mr. Ferrers, it is rather late in the day for all this to occur to you. Why didn't you think of this before?"

"I did: but you know how it came about that Faulconbridge offered his wife's services, just when George was reduced to a state of despair to find an actress who was to unite the separate qualifica-

tions his uncle and he required. Mrs. Faulconbridge seemed the very person who was wanted—a lady, young (and no doubt attractive, or Faulconbridge would not have married her), and, from what her husband says, with great dramatic ability. Of course, I was glad to give my friend this little lift, together with the opportunity of making friends for himself, if he will, among your fine folk; and, as I am afraid he is desperately poor, I could not decline Sir Richard's invitation for them, and send them to the inn. That is just how it happened. It doesn't ease my mind, however, about the success of their visit. Patience is not one of Faulconbridge's virtues; and the fine airs of all your London people will irritate him beyond measure, I'm afraid."

"What is it you wish me to do? I can't help people being vulgar and impertinent towards Mrs. Faulconbridge, if they have the bad taste to wish to mark their sense of her position. I hope they won't. I shall do all I can to show that I, at least, make no distinction between her and my uncle's other guests; but if your friend is so

sensitive, I do not think it wise to subject him, very probably, to annoyance. You know the world, Mr. Ferrers. You know that if this Mrs. Faulconbridge prove too attractive to all you gentlemen, she will suffer for it, at the hands of my sex."

"I know it; but I think if you will befriend her, the other ladies here will take their cue from you; and it is through his wife that Faulconbridge will suffer most. As to himself, he can hold his own against any impertinent young puppy; but, judging from what I know of him, I should think he would be uncommonly sensitive about anything touching his wife."

"You may depend upon my doing all I can to make matters smooth while your friend is here, Mr. Ferrers. But you have not seen him for some years, I think? He may be altered, grown more prudent and worldly-wise."

"I hope so. There was room for it. He is one of the cleverest fellows I ever met; but also, at that time, he was one of the most impetuous and intractable."

"You met him at Bonn, did you not?"

"Yes. I went over for my autumn holiday, four years ago, and entered a professor's family there, for a couple of months, to learn German. Faulconbridge was a student at the university, and living with this family. I took to him at once. It is humbug pretending to despise good looks; perhaps ugly men, like me, overvalue them. He is wonderfully handsome, or was, then; and if I hadn't been a model of equanimity, Lady Trevelyan, I should have railed at fortune, for the unequal distribution of her gifts. Here was this young fellow, twelve or fourteen years my junior, not content with his brilliant beauty, making me feel my intellectual poverty before I'd been two days under the same roof with him. Very arrogant, very illogical; but such eloquence, such imagination, and such wonderful facility in acquiring anything he chose, as seemed nothing short of marvellous to one of my slow apprehension. It required no Solon to predict that this young fellow would commit all sorts of folly during his career. Indeed, after I had left Bonn,

I heard that he had got into some terrible scrapes —fought two duels, and lost a lot of money, and got into various other entanglements—and from what he now tells me about his poverty, I believe this to be true; but he never wrote to me, as I asked him to do. His pride, I have no doubt, was too great to acknowledge his position to me."

"It is odd that a man of this kind should have had much attraction for *you*. I know it is a trite axiom that the more unlike people are in their tastes and pursuits, the better they suit; but I never found it so."

Ferrers thought of her late lord.

"I certainly took a great fancy to him then," he said; "but much that was pardonable in extreme youth would not be so in manhood. Four years ought to have—and, I hope, *have*—made a great difference in him."

"Why, yes; for it strikes me that you draw the picture of a singularly unprincipled youth."

"And yet that conveys a false idea of him in some respects; for certain principles, those of justice and honour especially, were strong in him;

while his good feeling, and even tenderness of heart, wherever he allowed himself to reflect, were very remarkable—very unlike most of the young men by whom he was surrounded. It is perfectly true that he had very few abstract ideas of right and wrong; or, rather, these ideas were in a strange confusion. If a wrong was done, he had no conception of a legal or an illegal way of setting it right. He would take the law into his own hands, and do it his own way. There were fine elements in his character, which had never been properly drawn out at that time; but I always felt that he ought to become a remarkable man, some day."

"Do you know anything of his family?"

"Nothing. I know he had some old relation, an aunt or a grandmother, living in Italy, where he had been entirely brought up; but he was anxious always to impress on me that he was an Englishman, and that his slight foreign accent was only the result of a foreign education. His idea then was to become tutor to some young Englishman who might wish to travel. I thought

—and told him—that he was fit for a more ambitious career, but he seemed to have made up his mind. I do not know what led him to change it, unless it be his marriage; and I regret exceedingly this new idea of the stage, for I expected that he would do great things some day."

"Why should he not do great things on the stage, if he is gifted, as you say?"

"In the first place, it is a calling which is held in low estimation now. There are men of education, and more than average ability, who derive but small incomes from hard work six nights in every week. It is horrible drudgery, of an unsatisfactory kind."

"That is to say, it would be so to you, because you have no fancy for the work. If you had a passion for it, as some have, and a great gift moreover, you would not find it so, probably."

"Well; even granting that, Faulconbridge's pride, his temper, his great refinement, all unfit him, it seems to me, for a calling where he will be constantly coming into contact with things

and people who will rub him up the wrong way. No; it is a mistake; I'm convinced of that."

"Your picture is not encouraging; but I maintain that if he has a real *genius*, it will be recognized, and his position at once assured. If he cares for the attentions of society, he will find it ready enough to take him up, immediately his name becomes famous."

"I don't say that such attentions may not flatter a man like Faulconbridge, but I say that such a man ought not to be in a position to be 'taken up,' and dropped, at the caprice of society. At all events, he ought to be proof against all the petty humiliations of such a position; and Faulconbridge is not so, I am afraid."

"He is likely to prove a troublesome guest here," said the lady, smiling. "I foresee that you have provided me with ample employment in throwing oil upon troubled waters during your friend's visit. What you say of him, however, interests me. His conversation will be a relief after the *very* small talk of our fashionable young men."

"I must be off," said Ferrers, looking at his watch. "I commend Faulconbridge and his wife especially to your tender care, Lady Trevelyan, while they are here. *Au revoir!*" and he cut across the rough-park, in the direction of the Stourbridge lodge-gate.

On the platform, two hours later, stood Bradley Ferrers.

"Stourbridge! Any passengers for Stourbridge?"

A couple of porters ran along the platform; and a young man, who was asleep in a second-class carriage, started up, and thrust his head out of window, shouting,—

"Why the deuce don't you open the door?"

The nearest functionary unlocked it, and, with singular forbearance, refrained from the obvious rejoinder to this demand.

Ferrers was at the other end of the line, peering about, with his short-sighted eyes, into every carriage, and wondering not to see his friend. At last he espied him, handing out a lady in black, closely veiled, and a dressing-case,

and a bag, and a roll of cloaks and shawls; and the next instant the two men were shaking hands very warmly. For a minute or two, Faulconbridge was so occupied in greeting his friend and in looking after his luggage, that he forgot the ceremony of introducing his wife. Then quickly turning round, and seeing her, he said,—

"Ferrers, let me introduce you to—Mrs. Faulconbridge—Mr. Bradley Ferrers. I am so little accustomed to the 'world,' and its forms, that I was very nearly allowing you to become acquainted without those four mystical words. That would be unpardonable in England, would it not? . . . . Porter, take care how you carry that box—right side up—and don't bang it down, as if you were pounding with a pestle and mortar."

"Sir Richard has sent the carriage for you, and the luggage will come up in the cart," said Ferrers.

There was a gentleman in powder, who, judging by his graceful attitude of indifference, as he leant upon the carriage-door, had apparently con-

sented to gratify the world by appearing in a becoming fancy dress of blue and silver on this occasion, and was reaping his reward in the group of admiring urchins round him. To this stately personage, the traveller, with unbecoming, not to say brutal levity, addressed himself,—

"Here! you, sir. Take these cloaks, and the writing-case, and bag, and put them inside the carriage."

"Sir Richard's horders, sir, is as nothink *his* to come up in the kerridge."

"I never part with that case. Put it in."

There was that in the stranger's eye which made the powdered gentleman deem it best to comply with the order, while it rendered him very sarcastic in his remarks that evening in the servants' hall upon the subject of "them low impertinent actors."

The carriage rolled through the dingy little town of Stourbridge, down the centre of which a stream, stained of the deepest blue, from a neighbouring dyer's yard, poured its unsavoury waters. Hand-bills, almost as large as the small

shop-windows that exhibited them, announced to every passer-by, with fatiguing iteration, that Amateur Theatricals in aid of the County Hospital would take place that day week. Yet larger posters to the same effect adorned every available space of wall; and the display of a pair of fly-blown white kid gloves, and a wreath of silver oak-leaves, in a respectable, musty old shop, sacred in ordinary times to worsted socks and flannel petticoats, indicated the forthcoming festivity.

Faulconbridge looked with all the curiosity of a foreigner at the characteristic features of a small English country-town: the gloomy uniformity of all the better houses, the narrow slips of clear pavement here and there, the dazzling brightness of its brass plates and knockers, the extraordinary stillness, and the absence of any idlers, save a knot of boys playing at marbles in the dust. They met two or three very neat old ladies, and one small young one, in a hat and feathers; they also passed a clergyman, a baker, and three or four farmers, and nondescript men, in dog-carts. Whether Faulconbridge contrasted all this favour

ably with the less reputable, but more picturesque, aspect of such a town abroad, is more than doubtful.

A short distance from the town stood the park-gates, where a mild woman, in lilac gingham, ambled out, in a minute, with the key of the padlock.

"You may open the carriage-door here, James. Mr. Faulconbridge and I will get out and walk across the park. We shall be at the house as soon as the carriage is."

And the two friends struck out at once into one of the wildest and most beautiful parts of the demesne.

CHAPTER IV.

STOURTON TOWERS.

Skirting the great lake over which large flocks of water-fowl were skimming, the two men walked briskly on, through the rough-park, and up a slope on which the ancestral oaks had been allowed time and room to stretch their arms, which they did, as though blessing the rich lands of Stourton below them. Their path for some distance lay under these trees; but Faulconbridge could not resist stopping short every now and then to watch a stately herd of deer, who, startled and immoveable, were paying him the same compliment, under the net-work shadow of the leafless boughs. The divine perfume of the woods strikes on no senses so keenly as on those fresh from the smoke and turmoil of a great city. The young

man was singularly alive to such impressions; the bright-eyed squirrels bounding from bough to bough, the rabbits darting across his path, the birds, the wild spring-flowers, as he trod with elastic step the short soft turf, and softer emerald moss, filled him with a sense of freedom and delight to which he had long been a stranger. It might be only transitory, but it was exhilarating while it lasted.

"You have nothing like this abroad, Faulconbridge. An old English park is a glorious thing."

The other made no reply. Head erect, with flushed cheek and glistening eye, he seemed to be sniffing the breath of the resinous pine-trees, and of every green thing round him, and to be in no humour to talk. At last, turning round suddenly, he said, with a long-drawn sigh,—

"You cannot tell, Ferrers, what I feel, after being cooped up, as I have been of late, in stifling streets! It is so long since I have breathed the sweet pure air of the woods. I am trying to forget that all this *belongs* to anybody. I am trying to

believe that this is wild free nature round me, which I have as much right to enjoy as its owner."

"We shall be at the house now in a few minutes, my dear fellow," said Ferrers, with a certain feeling of uneasiness; "and there are one or two things I want to say to you. First, this is, as you know, a great establishment full of state and ceremony. Sir Richard is a peculiar old gentleman, pompous, and not winning at first; and some of his guests are fine and airified folk, whom I dislike much. You mustn't allow yourself to be disgusted by all this. You will find George a very good fellow—a jovial, light-hearted, obstinate young chap, bent on having his own way in everything, but with a capital heart—a real gentleman, in short."

"Is it permitted to address the heir of Stourton unless he first speaks to one?" said the other, lighting his cigar. "And what form of speech does one use?"

"The least sarcastic is the most advisable, if you want to get on well, not with him only, but

with all here. It is time enough to show your teeth when you are scratched. Among amateur actors there is always plenty of jealousy, and the probability of a row. I hope you have gained experience since the old Bonn days, and are more cautious, Faulconbridge, eh?"

His friend did not reply, but said in a hard voice,—

"Tell me what I am to expect in Sir Richard. You say he is 'not winning at first'—does that mean that he is so at *last?*"

"Well, when one understands his peculiarities as I do, one gets on pretty well with him. He is absurdly proud about his family, rather silent and pompous in his manner, but hospitable and open-handed. He has led a very dissipated life; was a great deal with the Prince Regent in former days, and like many men of that sort, looks in society the very incarnation of stiffness and propriety. The one soft spot in his heart is his love for his nephew and heir, George Stourton."

"And he lets him do everything he likes?"

"Except marry for love. He looks on that

as a deplorable weakness of which *he* was never guilty, and which is most reprehensible. Immediately he sees the smallest sign of a flirtation with an ineligible girl, she is packed off—not allowed to remain in the house. On the other hand, a succession of suitable damsels are brought here with a tacit understanding between the mammas and Sir Richard, but hitherto without result. The bait doesn't take. George is one of those obstinate fish who prefer finding their own natural flies to being hooked by the finest artificial ones. I tell you this to put you *au courant* with the state of things here."

"And how do people account for Sir Richard's never having married himself—for ambition, let us say, if for nothing else?"

"Well, he was getting old when he came into the property—forty-seven or so—and with a constitution impaired, I fancy, by the life he had led. His brother, Sir Henry, had been separated from his wife for many years, and had no children, so that Sir Richard was his heir-at-law; but of course there was always the chance of the wife

dying, and his marrying again, which did, in fact, take place a year or two before he died. However, he had no children by this second marriage either, so that Sir Richard, during his brother's life, lived upon *hope* and his debts, which I fancy were great. He was always of a different disposition to Sir Henry, who was a great screw. But this property was the gainer, and has suffered proportionately since Sir Richard came into it. It is wretchedly managed now. George will find trouble enough to get things into order when he inherits. However, the old gentleman has a fair life yet. He is not much past seventy, which is middle-aged in these days, and since he has led a steady life, he has hardly had a day's illness. He passes a certain number of months at his chambers in the Albany, where he gives the most *recherché* little dinners (being still somewhat addicted to the 'pleasures of the table,' as they are called), and he comes down here for the remainder of the year, where he has generally a house-full of people."

"Pleasant and profitable existence," said the

younger man, puffing energetically at his cigar. "Do ladies never demur as to visiting the house of this venerable disciple of Epicurus?"

"He is fortunate in having a very charming niece, who does the honours for him generally when he is here. I advise your trying to make a friend of her. Faulconbridge, she is a first-rate woman—one in ten thousand. But look! there is the north tower rising above those trees. That is to be your abode, I believe; and you have the best view in the house."

Faulconbridge stood still, and with folded arms remained silently contemplating the scene for some minutes, until his companion observed,—

"My dear fellow, we shall be late; Mrs. Faulconbridge will have arrived before us. You will have time enough to see all this while you are here. Come."

As they descended the open slope, the house, or castle, as it might almost be called, came fully in sight. It was an imposing mass of building, to which each succeeding generation had contributed something, from the days of John of Gaunt

downwards. The grim north tower, a square keep covered with ivy, was said to have owed its existence to that prince, and was the oldest portion of the present house. It stretched forth like a mailed right hand away from the main building, the principal part of which dated from the reign of James the Second. It was exceedingly irregular, however, and both Queen Anne and George the Third had left the distinctive marks of their respective ages on this side of the house. Beyond and behind it, in the opposite direction to the north tower, rose three or four small turrets, belonging to the offices, which occupied a large space of ground, but were hidden from this point by the chapel. This beautiful specimen of flamboyant Gothic architecture bore the brutal stamp of the Commonwealth in its mutilated ornaments and niches despoiled of their saints. It adjoined the south front of the mansion, and was flanked by the clock-tower, under which a wide archway led to the stables and farm-buildings. A broad terrace ran round the south and east fronts. The entrance was upon the former side—the same as

the chapel and gateway. The flower-garden, with its fountain and stiff yew hedges, was upon the latter side, facing the library and drawing-room windows. The effect of the whole was very stately, thrown out from a background of wide-stretching woods, which surrounded the house upon three sides.

They reached the steps of the grey-stone porch as the carriage drove up.

Bradley Ferrers handed out Mrs. Faulconbridge. The lady's hand trembled a little: he could not see her face, by reason of her veil. They went up the steps, and passed between the double row of powdered gentlemen in blue and silver, till an official in black, whom Mrs. Faulconbridge, in her ignorance, took for their host himself, received them with an urbane bow. So white and polished was this individual, that he looked as if he were carved out of ivory, and then set in ebony, as to his garments. He conducted the newly-arrived guests, with a noiseless tread, across the great oak hall, to a vast, dim library, which was unoccupied. By the lady this was felt

to be an inestimable relief: if only a few moments' reprieve, it was something.

"I am not certain," said the bland official in the purest English, with a slight forward inclination of the ebony frame, "whether Sir Richard is in the house. I will inform Lady Trevelyan. I believe her ladyship is within. Mr. and Mrs. F—Fullconridge, I believe?"

"Faulconbridge," said Bradley, quickly, "and, Millet, if you can't find Lady Trevelyan, let Mr. and Mrs. Faulconbridge see their rooms at once."

"I will inquire of Mrs. Pendarves, sir." Then referring to a slip of paper in his hand,—"We have other guests arriving to-day, and I am not sure ——"

"I think they are to have the north tower."

"I will inquire, Mr. Ferrers," and the groom of the chambers silently glided over the Aubusson carpet, and drifted out of the room.

Let us listen for a moment to the comments of the gentlemen in blue and silver, on the party who have just run the gauntlet of their ranks.

"Them's the actors, ain't it?"

"She's 'the woman in *black*,' she is—he! he! I say, Charley, what a stuck-up-looking chap *he* is. We must take him down a peg."

"Ay; Jim says he was cheeky to him at the station. Confound him; a low feller like that."

"I say, did you *hever* see such close as that Ferrers wears? I wouldn't pick 'em off a dung-hill."

"That swell Etheridge is the one to dress. I shouldn't mind havin' the pick of *his* wardrobe. Wilmot don't dress bad, neither, do he?"

"Hm! it ain't my style. Noisy."

"I say, I 'spose these people hasn't no servants, has they?"

"Servants! Bless your soul, they blacks their own shoes, they does!"

This was greeted with a chorus of laughter as the gentlemen sauntered away, their hands in their pockets.

"I see, Faulconbridge, you are looking at Sir Richard's portrait by Sir Thomas Laurence, done fifty years ago," said Ferrers. "He is rather

different-looking now. You mustn't expect to see a slim exquisite with pink cheeks and fair hair, but a gouty, red-faced old gentleman. Time is given to effecting such metamorphoses, you know."

His friend had, indeed, remained gazing for some minutes, with a face of intense scrutiny, upon the full-length portrait, beneath which the baronet's name was inscribed. It represented a handsome fair young man, standing uncovered in a thunderstorm. His attire, moreover, was so unsuited to the inclement weather, that it produced an uncomfortable shivering sensation on the beholder. Spotless tights—and very tight they were—acted as capitals to two symmetrical columns, one of which was gracefully advanced, so as to catch a shaft of light upon its silken surface. The superstructure thus supported was a blue coat with brass buttons, high in the collar, and short in the waist. Then came several folds of white linen, unpleasantly suggestive of a poultice, and on the top of all, a handsome hard face, with sensual lips, and pale blue eyes, that shone out coldly from under a forest of fair locks,

which the hair-dresser's art had encouraged to conceal such frontal development as the original might have possessed. Perhaps partly owing to a costume which changes of fashion have made us regard as absurd, the effect of the picture was eminently unpleasing; and so the young man who looked at it seemed to think. He turned away with knit brows, and a scornful expression of mouth, as the door opened, and Lady Trevelyan entered.

Mrs. Faulconbridge had drawn back her veil. She rose and timidly took the hand Lady Trevelyan held out, with a few kind words, calculated to set the visitor at her ease. Ferrers thought his friend's wife gentle and ladylike, but he was disappointed in her beauty. She looked pale, and frightened, and tired.

Faulconbridge's brow relaxed from the almost savage scowl which had contracted it a minute before. He felt at once the influence of that graceful and gracious demeanour, the soothing effect of that sweet voice and smile. However democratic his prejudices might be, however his

own position might gall him into resentment towards those in a higher station than himself—it was impossible to deny that here was one of Nature's true gentlewomen, whatever her rank in life.

"Will you come up to my boudoir, Mrs. Faulconbridge, and have some tea, or do you like better to go to your rooms and be left in peace till dinner-time?"

Mrs. Faulconbridge was understood to falter that she would go up to her room.

"It is only half-past four. We do not dine for three hours, but I dare say you will be glad of the rest after your journey. I shall leave Mr. Faulconbridge to you, Mr. Ferrers. I think you will find some of the gentlemen in the racket-court, but Sir Richard is out, and George too, I think."

It was quite a long walk to the tower—across the hall and up the great staircase, and down a corridor which ran through the whole east side of the house, and through a door of communication before one found oneself upon the stone

staircase of the old tower. Upon this floor and the one above were the half deserted rooms dedicated to the Faulconbridges. They had the tower all to themselves. Below, there was nothing but a lumber-room, with a blocked-up door communicating with the outer air. On the first floor was a small sitting-room and a still smaller bed-room inside it, the furniture of both being meagre in the extreme. These rooms were Mrs. Faulconbridge's. Above, was one large room with an old crazy bed in it, and windows looking three ways, where Mr. Faulconbridge could walk about all night long if it so pleased him, and receive men during the day, without disturbing his wife. This upper floor, therefore, was to be exclusively his. Over it was nothing but the roof. The tower was the very last portion of the house ever allotted to guests. Occasionally, when every other room was occupied, a couple of very young men were banished to this distant settlement; but it was rare; and to those who were not blinded by an enthusiastic love of antiquity or romance, the gloomy old tower certainly offered few attractions.

Mrs. Pendarves had not grudged, therefore, this profuse expenditure of house-room for the "actor-people." The tower was good enough for them, and not good enough for any one else; so here they were to reign supreme.

"I am not very far from you, Mrs. Faulconbridge," said Lady Trevelyan, when she had conducted her to her room. "This corridor leads directly to your tower, and the third door on the left-hand side is mine. Our windows run at right angles with each other, so that I can almost see into the North Tower. Pray come to me, therefore, if you want anything. Shall I send my maid to you?"

"No, thank you. I am not accustomed to a maid. I do everything for myself. It is very kind of you."

"Pray let me know, then, if you want anything. You know, now, where to find me, and I hope, during your stay here, that if I can be of any use to you, Mrs. Faulconbridge, you will not scruple to tell me."

Mrs. Faulconbridge murmured her thanks once

more; but looked ill at ease. Lady Trevelyan was not slow to perceive that her departure would be an immense relief to the young woman; so with another kind word or two she left her.

And then, Mrs. Faulconbridge, sinking down upon the corded trunk before her, buried her head in her hands, and burst into tears.

CHAPTER V.

THE GUESTS.

Depressing as the quarter of an hour preceding dinner generally is, it was doubly so at Stourton Towers. People dropped into the room, and sank like pebbles in deep water, with at most a trifling splash, an eddy in their immediate vicinity—no more. They sat down as far from each other as possible, feeling probably that the grand tug of social war, the effort to be agreeable for a whole evening, had not yet begun, and that nothing could yet be expected of them. Those ladies who talked at all seemed to speak under their breath, and the men mostly congregated in the embrasures of distant windows.

In the midst of a scattered group, with his back to the fire, stands Sir Richard Stourton. It is

hardly possible to trace in him any likeness to the brilliant young man in Sir Thomas Laurence's portrait. Time worketh great changes. But time alone will not effect such changes as we see here. The face swollen and bloated, of a redness inclining unto purple, the lower lip drooping, the whole head, as it would seem, held upright by the rigid white stock, several inches in height, and apparently hewn out of solid marble. The chestnut perruque is a melancholy parody on those Hyperion curls opposite; the unwieldy body in its capacious white waistcoat, the gouty legs, and the gold-headed cane on which he leans, bear little resemblance to the active grace of Sir Thomas Laurence's original. One thing only is the same in both. The expression of the cold blue eyes is but little changed.

And that grace which is the only worthy exchange for youth and beauty, that charm which belongs to a venerable age, Sir Richard Stourton has, alas! not acquired. He is past seventy; but the respect which waits upon threescore years and ten he has not, nor does he care, perhaps, to

possess. He inspires a just awe: and that he encourages. His taste is supposed to be the most refined and fastidious (whether as regards the points of a woman's figure or the seasoning of a dish), and his manners the most formally and icily perfect of any of those specimens of "the grand style" who have been spared to this generation. There are many who affirm that when "the first gentleman in Europe" died, the baronet was the only one left who could make a bow. Was there ever anything like his way of taking snuff? How many a man has broken down ingloriously in the attempt to imitate it! He rarely laughs; but at some of Mr. Carton's stories he smiles—and gossipping old ladies tell us that smile was irresistible once, and repeat stories in which their friends bear scandalously conspicuous parts, I grieve to say. Certain notorious memoirs of that day furnish us, moreover, with details which place it beyond doubt that Sir Richard was once a very seductive man. He is so no longer. But as he is very liberal, nay, profuse, in his expenditure, there are persons who defend him. It is a comfort to

think that none of us are so bad, but what some one will be found to throw down a gauntlet for us.

Sir Richard at this moment is trying to keep alive a little smouldering conversation with a jagged oldish lady in diamonds. This is Lady Bideford, who, had she been fortunate enough to live in the last century, would have worn her own white hair and cap, and been seasonably and decently clad in kerchief and ruffle. As it is, in this year of grace 1857, she wears no cap, but a wreath of artificial flowers in her dyed hair, and exposes to view a vast deal of yellow skin and bone. She has very rheumatic fingers, on some of which her resplendent rings have stuck half way; and altogether her appearance exhibits the gracelessness of a vain endeavour to escape from the common lot of age.

Her daughters are there also. The eldest, Lady Katherine Power, however, alone inherits the beauty Lady Bideford is said to have once possessed. She has been "out" only six years; she is only four-and-twenty, but already the lines are getting more hard and angular—the resemblance

to her mamma more painfully seen each season. The freshness of youth's spirit, if it ever existed there, has departed with its bloom. She is a *blasée*, faded young lady of fashion, in whom one or two "disappointments" have somewhat soured the milk of human kindness; it had never had time to turn to cream, being subject to constant and bitter disturbance. And Lady Bideford, who was not an ill-natured woman originally, is now, where the interests of her favourite daughter are concerned (and they are concerned whenever it is question of another girl), sharp and acid of tongue. Her hand is against every woman who can, by any possibility, interfere with Lady Katherine's "prospects." Poor Lady Julia can hardly be said to have any. She is decidedly plain, and very shy and silent; she is gentle and good, however, and the world not having spoiled her, as it has her sister, they have probably few ideas in common, which makes the naturally awkward girl shrink yet further into the background. Lady Bideford looks on her daughters as belonging to two different orders of creation. As long as Lady Katherine is unmarried, it is out

of the range of possibility that any one shall turn his eyes in Julia's direction.

These young ladies are seated together on a distant ottoman in a perfect cloud of gauze. On either side of them are Etheridge and Louis Granfield, endeavouring to pump up little jets of small talk, yet scarcely enough to sprinkle the silence with a faint murmur from time to time. The latter, Lord Granfield's only son, is a large man of thirty, slow of speech, and uncommonly shy with women. With men he is very popular. He is in the House, and a useful man on committees. In private life he is remarkable for a misplaced attachment to theatricals; nature has endowed him with no qualification for the stage; but once on it, and disguised in a comic wig and breeches, he loses all his shyness.

On the other side of the fireplace is a bald, stout man of exceeding gravity, with heavy eyes that can never be induced to keep wide open, so that he carries his head at an angle of forty-five degrees, in order to command the features of those he addresses. He is listening with apparently drowsy

attention to a "communication" made to him in a whisper by a little iron-grey man who scarcely reaches up to his shoulder. The bald man is Lord Granfield, who held a place once for a few months in the Ministry, and is reckoned a solid, dependable man by his party; he is a great agriculturist, a great promoter of all sanitary measures, and partial to talking of drains and sewers. The little iron-grey man is Mr. Carton, a snob of the first water, who is invited from house to house because he is "such a brilliant talker," and is supposed—upon his own authority—to have some mysterious connection with Government. When he is not engrossing the attention of a whole dinner-table he is pouring into the ear of his neighbour a State mystery only known to the Prime Minister and himself. He was once kicked out of a club for making one of these confidential "communications," it is true—but what of that? It was a disgraceful cabal, and his admirers looked upon him as a martyr. It is needless to say that he is a tremendous tuft-hunter; and that his gallantry is of that school which teaches that the

grossest possible flattery must be acceptable to every woman. He repeats his good (or bad) stories till they lose something of their first freshness; but in great, formal parties, like this one at Stourton Towers, even Carton's stories may be gratefully received sometimes. So thinks not George Stourton, however. He does not love Mr. Carton. "*Some* speech may be silver," he says, "but Carton's is only brass. As to silence, which is gold, we know he hasn't a rap."

The young gentleman who passes this severe remark is now standing at the further end of the room. Bailey, a retired soldier, Wilmot, and another man, are with him in the deep bay-window, from which the sound of their voices comes down the room in a confused manner.

George Stourton is "rising three-and-twenty," as he would himself express it. A better type of the young well-born Englishman it is impossible to see. Fair, as his uncle once was, with blue eyes, too; yet very different ones. These are pleasant eyes to look into; not because of their power, depth, or beauty, but for their clear, keen

truthfulness, their quick intelligence, their honest sparkle of enjoyment. A soft yellow moustache already clothes the upper lip, but the outline of the jaw and chin is not yet hid with hair. And the contour thus revealed indicates no ordinary amount of firmness. The frank cordial disposition of the mouth may harden into obstinacy: it will never become oscillating and weak.

Bailey is Mrs. Bailey's husband. No more need be said of him. That pretty little lady, with the most insatiable thirst for admiration and the smallest feet woman 'ever walked on, is sitting hard by—quite accidentally, be it understood, for she is not so lost to all sense of social decorum as to get near her husband in society, if she can help it. A little further off good old Lady Granfield, an excellent soul, but not calculated to add to the hilarity of a country-house, is panting, after the fatigue of coming downstairs, upon a sofa. Her expression and attitude recall a Chinese idol, mouth a-jar, and both hands upon her knees.

Beyond her again is a restless figure, belonging to a female of uncertain age, but still by courtesy

called "a young lady." Miss Skipton is clad in a muslin frock with a blue sash—*à la sweet girl*, as our neighbours have it. This innocent attire has a habit of slipping off her shoulders, which, I suppose, necessitates a movement not unlike that which sailors (on the stage at least) apply to another garment. She wears a gold chain from which an eye-glass depends, and her fingers have a nervous habit of twitching this, and running round and round it, like a squirrel in its cage. The grasses in her hair are in a constant twitter: the eyes, screwed up to a short-sighted focus, are never quiet for an instant. They are perpetually turned towards the door; and each time it opens, up goes the glass.

Two or three men come in, among them Bradley Ferrers: then, Lady Trevelyan. Miss Skipton turns away each time, her curiosity disappointed. Every one is now assembled but Mr. and Mrs. Faulconbridge.

Lady Trevelyan is going to sit down near Lady Granfield, when George calls to her.

"I say, Di, do come here. Tell us what our

new Pauline is like? We are dying of curiosity. Why doesn't she appear?"

"The gong has only just sounded. She is very pretty as far as I could see in her bonnet, and very quiet. A little nervous, poor thing, coming among a set of strangers—no wonder!"

"And the husband?"

"I didn't hear him speak. He is very handsome."

"You ought to get him to sit to you, Di."

"We will arrange a mythological tableau, George, with Mrs. Faulconbridge for Venus, and her husband as Mars, and you as young Bacchus——"

"Come, that's rather hard. Had it been after dinner——"

"Ah! you have only the vulgar idea of Bacchus. But seriously, I wish you would get up something of an evening, to make it less dreadfully long."

"Well," laughed George, "let us see how we can cast our parts for Olympus. You're Diana ready-made, of course. Poor old Skipton would do for Minerva, because she looks such an owl—

blinking, as she does, eh? Then Carton—what shall we give Carton? He is so given to drawing with the long-bow, that he ought decidedly to be Phœbus Apollo; and——"

"Hush! George, people will hear you. What stuff you do talk! I wish these people would come down. Sir Richard won't wait a minute, I know; and it will be so uncomfortable for them to walk into dinner by themselves."

Mr. Millet threw open the folding doors of the dining-room, just as Edgar Faulconbridge and his wife entered by the opposite one.

Sir Richard was in the act of extending his arm to Lady Granfield. He stopped short, eyeing with cold scrutiny the fair figure that advanced towards him. He could not avoid showing some surprise. He had almost forgotten the expected arrival of these insignificant guests: they were asked to please George, and went in the general "ruck" of visitors in the second class, about whom he never troubled his head. But here was something which so fastidious a judge as Sir Richard could not pass over. In her rich black dress, with a

few pearls twisted in her red-gold hair, Mrs. Faulconbridge looked a very different person to the pale tired young woman half-hid under a crape veil, whom Lady Trevelyan had greeted on arrival.

Sir Richard, with a grand, solemn bow, extended his hand to the lady and then to her husband. It obviated a good deal of awkwardness—Faulconbridge may indeed have timed his entry with a view to such result,—that the bustle of proceeding into dinner immediately followed. Lady Trevelyan introduced George to Mrs. Faulconbridge, and followed herself with Lord Granfield; Faulconbridge, Bailey, and some other men, brought up the rear. The latter all eyed the stranger, and then sauntered on, leaving him to follow. His quick eye, however, and his activity made him espy and secure a place next Lady Trevelyan, while the others were still hovering between the two sides of the table.

"A sweet-looking young woman, Sir Richard!" said Lady Granfield. "What's her name?"

Sir Richard responded rather shortly, and ate his soup in silence.

Miss Skipton whispered in a fever of enthusiasm to her neighbour—

"Oh, Mr. Ferrers! how could you tell me you were disappointed in your friend's wife? She is perfectly beautiful! What an interesting looking creature, too! I am sure I shall like her—quite feel a sympathy already. I do so wish I were sitting next her—so unlucky!"

"Thank you, Miss Skipton," said Bradley, bowing with a smile. "As to Mrs. Faulconbridge's beauty, I must retract my opinion. I only saw her in her bonnet; she looks quite another woman out of it. She is very pretty, certainly. But somehow one's friends never marry the sort of woman one expects. I don't know how it is. I fancied Faulconbridge's wife quite another person."

Further down the table, Lady Katherine, seated between Etheridge and Wilmot, turned languidly from one to the other, as she reposed from her crinoline arrangements, and said—

"Well? what do you think of the actress?"

"She does the *petite ingénue*," said Etheridge, staring at her across the table.

"I think her lovely," said the less experienced youth, on her other side. "Such a complexion! hasn't she?"

"If it comes to that, we can all make ourselves look pink and white, you know. Actresses are universally painted. That is such very bad style. I am sorry to say there are women really in one's *own set* who are one mass of paint now; and of course you can't expect an actress, you know, to be anything else. That red hair, too! No, I can't say I admire her. It may be my bad taste; but I like something more refined. I daresay she is just the style to suit all you gentlemen."

She was right. The women were divided in their verdict; but the men in their hearts, if not in their words, almost unanimous. Lady Bideford and Mrs. Bailey ranged themselves, of course, with Lady Katherine. Lady Julia threw a timid vote into the opposite scale. Louis Granfield, who sat next her, observed after a long pause:

"Good *consommé*, this. Hare. Do you like light or brown?"

"Oh, light. So pretty, waving in that way; and sweet eyes, too."

"What? Oh, the actress's! Mrs. What's-her-name? Yes, she'll do, I think. Good-looking fellow, too, the husband."

"Y—yes. He looks rather cross."

Granfield relapsed into silence, repeating to himself, "Extraordinary thing to find one woman admiring another."

The "good-looking fellow" naturally passed a great portion of the dinner in silence and moody contemplation of the *épergne* before him; Lady Trevelyan being bound to devote most of her attention to the dull old gentleman on her left, while Mr. Carton, on Faulconbridge's other side, was far too worldly-wise to waste his time on the young stranger. Besides, it was his business to talk for that end of the table collectively, and he did his duty. Opposite, acquaintance was being made more rapidly.

"You have lately come to England, I think," said George. "Have you lived much abroad?"

"Always."

"Indeed? And how do you like what you have seen of England?"

She looked rather troubled to reply, but shook her head—

"Not much. But then I have seen nothing but a gloomy London lodging for nearly two months. I never saw the sky there."

"I can well believe that. But I suppose you had some friends there?"

She shook her head again.

"No; none."

"London, in the winter, and without friends! I can't conceive anything so awful. No wonder you hate England, if this is your experience of it."

"Oh, I didn't say I *hated* it," replied Mrs. Faulconbridge, looking up for the first time directly into his face. "You mistook me. I have always been taught to honour and admire everything that is English. Only London seemed gloomy and dreary at first after dear Italy."

"You have lived principally in Italy, then? How I should like to go there."

The lady did not see exactly what reply she ought to make to this: and after casting about in her mind, remained silent. George continued—

"I suppose your taste for the drama, then, Mrs. Faulconbridge, has been chiefly cultivated by the Italian stage? Have they good actors there?"

"I know very little of them. It was seldom thought good enough to take me to. My taste for the drama was brought out by reading Shakspeare, and hearing it read at home."

"And you have never acted then, at all, even in private?"

"I have recited detached scenes sometimes of an evening—nothing more: Latterly," she added, looking down upon her plate, "Mr. Faulconbridge has taken up my education for the stage."

"Only think of your introduction to the British Melpomene being on the boards of the Stourbridge Theatre! While I can't say how lucky I think *we* are, I must add that I'm sorry for *you*. I'm afraid you'll find us a horrid set of muffs. I can't get the fellows to learn their

parts. I hope your husband will pitch into them."

Mrs. Faulconbridge looked up, astonished. And then for the first time since she entered those doors, she laughed.

"You don't mean that he is to beat them?"

"Not exactly—though some of them really deserve it. There is Colonel Etheridge, that very smart gentleman—do you see? next the thin young lady with the high nose—he never *will* know his part, I'm certain. He is to do Beauséant—the heavy swell business in the *Lady of Lyons*. Then Wilmot, the young fellow down there by Mrs. Bailey (the little woman in pink), he is not so bad about learning, but I'm afraid he will prove a 'regular stick on the stage. Ferrers has good-naturedly consented to do Old Deschappelles, but he has never acted before, and the sort of thing ain't at all in his line,—as your husband probably knows. No; we haven't a first-rate *corps dramatique*, I am afraid."

"But you," said the lady, timidly, as though she were uncertain if she were not taking a

great liberty; "you are a very good actor—are you not?"

"Oh, dear, no!" laughed George; "it is a perfect passion with me, and I think I might act some day if I had practice. But I have acted very little, and had no instruction. I mean to try and profit by your husband's."

"Which are the ladies?"

"The only one who is here is that—how shall I describe her?—that middle-aged young lady looking at you now, through her glass. She is the best old soul,—I beg her pardon—the best young thing, I mean, in existence. So good-natured, she'll do anything for one. She is a regular trump. When these plays were first talked of, and all the women were so tiresome about it, dear old Skippy was ready to do anything to be useful. She is your mother, Madame Deschappelles. There is another lady in the neighbourhood, a Mrs. Whitehed, who is to be *my* mother, the widow Melnotte, and also acts as Mrs. Bouncer, in *Box and Cox*, which is the after-piece. Granfield is more in his element

in *that*, than in *our* play. He takes the part of Damas, and I have begged him to make it as little like Buckstone as he can. He is a capital fellow, but he is never completely happy out of a farce. We shall have dreadful work with the rehearsals, I know. Have you an inexhaustible stock of patience, Mrs. Faulconbridge?"

Her laughing eyes replied before her words.

"You are bound to believe that we are all Griseldas till we prove the contrary."

But a shade passed swiftly over her face, as he jokingly said,—

"I hope you have never been so tried? To-morrow we must have some little private, detached rehearsals, and I want your husband to show me how to say some parts; but the next day we'll have a regular rehearsal at the theatre."

"Is this a common amusement in England?" asked Mrs. Faulconbridge. "Is acting very general among amateurs?"

"Yes, but not in public. This is rather an exceptional case. The hospital wanted funds, and a bazaar was talked of. I happened to be down

here, on leave, and proposed this as being *rather* more amusing. This is the slowest county in England, Mrs. Faulconbridge, and Stourton Towers is the slowest house in the county, so I hope this brilliant idea of mine will answer. We kill two birds, you see, Time and Charity, with one stone. People like laughing at their friends too—while they lay the 'flattering unction to their souls' that they are doing a good deed, all the time. It is sure to pay, for more than two hundred tickets are taken already. It is a regular theatre, you know. Oh, no sham, but the genuine thing, with a flavour of gas and orange-peel about it."

"You are an enthusiast, indeed."

"I delight in everything about a theatre, down to the pasteboard crowns and helmets; I always did. I don't wonder at any one going on the stage, who has real talent for it. I'd go myself to-morrow, only—only ——"

The lady did not help to finish his sentence for him. She said, quietly,—

"Mr. Faulconbridge will be glad to hear you

say that, so many of his friends have opposed his going on the stage. They have tried to discourage us both. They have told me my foreign accent would interfere with my success in England."

"Accent? You have no accent in the world. What stuff!"

"And then I am not very strong—I have not physical strength, that is to say, for the great tragic parts, and without this they have told me I can never be a real *prima donna*."

George thought as he looked at her that she was likely to be the *prima donna* in whatever company she found herself. What an enchanting creature! how fresh, and unlike all the other women around her!

"Still," she went on, "as Edgar will go on the stage with me, I am resolved to try. We are very poor," her large soft eyes looked straight up into his face again—"very poor, and everybody ought to try and do something. It is the only thing I can do. It will not separate me from my—Mr. Faulconbridge. I hope they

won't hiss me; I should not like that. I am afraid I should not have courage to try again."

"I think you need have no fears."

"I am glad I am to make my first experiment here, where, from what you say, I may hope for an indulgent audience."

"I should think so! Why, the very idea of our acting has produced a ferment of excitement over the county. I am only afraid of their overdoing the applause."

"I am not afraid of that," said Mrs. Faulconbridge, shaking her head, with a smile.

"Pray look at the actress, Mr. Wilmot," exclaims Mrs. Bailey, as she eats her orange ice. "That affectation of extreme bashfulness has quite worn away *already*, you see. Pray, observe her, laughing quite familiarly with Mr. Stourton *already!* Isn't that rich? after all those airs of shyness and extreme innocence! It is really as good as a farce!"

Wilmot has bought his experience since the beginning of dinner, and forbears from expressing his opinion.

Soon after the ladies rise: and when the men "close up" to the top of the table, Edgar Faulconbridge finds himself within two seats of the baronet.

CHAPTER VI.

AN EVENING AT STOURTON TOWERS.

Sir Richard Stourton, probably deeming it incumbent on him to address a word or two to his new guest, took an opportunity,—when Lord Granfield had done a dissertation on sub-soiling and covered draining, and the expediency of "utilizing the sewage of great towns" to enrich the fields,—to observe:

"The wine stands with you, Mr. Faulconbridge. You will not find the claret amiss; '34 vintage. You come from the Continent, I believe? Mr. Ferrers, be good enough to pass me the biscuits. No life like the Continent, eh, Granfield, for a man who has no ties, no responsibilities, and so forth?"

"I hate the Continent," said his lordship, under his drooping lids. "I never want to cross the Channel."

"This confounded climate plays the deuce with a man's constitution in the winter," said Sir Richard.

"Did you ever try the climate of Italy? Perhaps that would suit your constitution better," observed Faulconbridge, as he peeled his orange with great care.

Sir Richard coughed slightly. "Not for many years." Then, with an attempt at pleasantry, he moved his head round, marble neckcloth and all, in the direction of Lord Granfield: "We didn't feel climate when we were younger (the peer was twelve years his junior) as we do now, eh?"

"Besides the ties and responsibilities you spoke of multiply, of course, as a man gets on in life," pursued Faulconbridge. He spoke with the same imperturbable manner; he did not look up, as the orange-peel dropped in one unbroken spiral from his knife.

Sir Richard shot a glance—a momentary glance—at the speaker from his cold blue eyes, but sipped his claret, without reply. He was surprised, no doubt, at such perfect coolness from a stranger,

and that stranger a guest in Faulconbridge's position. He meant this young man to feel that he, Sir Richard Stourton, was conferring a great favour upon him. But, after all, there was nothing in either the manner or the matter of what had just been said that could be called in the least ungentlemanlike. The most that could be urged against the speaker was that he had rather too much *àplomb*, perhaps, for so young a man.

"The necessity of living, more or less, upon one's estate *is* a heavy tie. You don't feel them, Granfield;" and Sir Richard once more brought head and stock round to bear upon the peer. "You don't feel them, for this horrid climate don't affect you. I am a martyr to rheumatism here in the winter."

"You should drain more, Stourton; that is the thing. I would drain that lake of yours if the place were mine. 'Twould improve your land vastly; and by making use, too, of the sewerage of this great house, you'd double your crops—you would, indeed."

"Ah, it is possible," said the baronet. "Mr.

Wilmot, be good enough to pass the wine; it is with you. George, ring for another bottle."

"Ringing for another bottle," said Carton, "puts me in mind of a story of——"

"Capital story it is," put in Master George, pertly. "You told it the other night; don't you remember? Etheridge, give me the walnuts. Mr. Faulconbridge, try this fresh bottle. I hope it is good."

"It is corked," observed Faulconbridge, quietly setting down his glass.

"Fancy a fellow of that sort," whispered Etheridge, "knowing if a bottle is corked or not. D——d impertinent."

"Well, I suppose he can taste as well as any one else; it *is* corked." (Aloud.) "We will have another up in a minute." (Aside again.) "Deuced handsome fellow he is, to be sure!"

"Does the Manfred business too much. Decidedly of the stage, stagey."

"Well, come, you'll admit the wife is charming? Perfectly natural, and uncommonly pretty. I haven't seen such eyes, and skin, and hair, I don't know the time when."

"Yes, oh! yes, she is a pretty woman. If she had the tournure of society, she would be——"

"Not half so attractive. It is that simplicity which is so refreshing, after . . . what one is accustomed to."

He was thinking of Lady Katherine. A few minutes after, when the subject had dropped, and George was in an animated discussion with Ferrers, Etheridge turned to Wilmot, on the other side of him, and said with a sneer,—

"George Stourton seems to be caught with the actress. Did you watch him at dinner? I never saw him so *épris* with a woman in my life. I should advise him to take care what he is about. The husband don't look like a man to be trifled with."

One of Carton's stories was now in full swing. George's efforts had proved ineffectual; it was not to be warded off. An anecdote of the coarsest description, in which a living lady of celebrity had played a part, had been introduced—as only Carton knew how—for Sir Richard's especial edification.

have said that the baronet seldom laughed; but

his face relaxed into a smile of keen relish before the choice *ana* Carton was always ready to serve up. The generality of men are disposed to laugh at, however little they may approve of, stories of this description. Faulconbridge was surprised to overhear George mutter between his teeth, as he looked daggers across at the little grey-headed orator,—

"Nasty old beast!"

The former leant forward and said,—

"That gentleman's narrative is characterized by a pleasing candour of detail."

They were the first words he had addressed to George, who replied,—

"He would not indulge in it twice, if this were my house. I wonder my uncle can tolerate such a sneaking rascal, who tells lies about half the women he knows, and insinuates worse about the other half. A fellow may *do* what he likes, but to *talk* in that way, and at his age! I should like to kick him, if he wasn't so small."

"It is a matter of fashion," said the other, composedly. "Sir Richard seems accustomed to

it. In his day, a select court circle, I imagine, was not very choice in its language."

"Perhaps not; but Sir Richard, at all events, never recalls the habits of that day unpleasantly; and I can't understand his allowing this little snob to do so."

Faulconbridge murmured a line from Hudibras, the drift of which Stourton did not seize, and the elders rising at the same moment, while the last chuckle of Carton's story died away, there was a general move into the drawing-room.

Bradley Ferrers in the course of the evening was standing behind Lady Trevelyan's chair.

"What do you think of my friend?" he said.

"I can't make him out exactly. He seems odd. His head;—you know I have been dabbling in phrenology lately, though I don't know much about it—his head is a curious study, if the science is to be believed at all."

"Why so?"

The lady hesitated, while she kept her eyes fixed upon Faulconbridge, who was at the further

end of the room, turning over a portfolio of engravings.

"I fancy I see developed there such very contradictory organs."

"If phrenology is worth anything, so I should think you would see in most heads. It is very rare, indeed, to find the various parts of a character fitting consistently."

"A strong love of justice; and yet a tendency to be a tyrant—to carry everything before him; and indomitable perseverance or obstinacy, or whatever you like to call it. Am I right so far?"

"Yes; but I gave you the clue to *that* this morning," laughed Ferrers.

"Furthermore, I fancy the owner of that head has very strong affections, but little benevolence or veneration. As to the intellectual organs, one sees at once that he *must* have imagination and language. Both are strongly developed."

"No doubt. With regard to his character, he seems to me so much changed since I knew him, that I am puzzled myself. He is so much

graver and gloomier. The very expression of his face is altered."

"He does not look like the husband of that fair young wife, does he? He rather depressed me at dinner; though I must say that when I spoke to him he was agreeable; but when I was talking to Lord Granfield, I turned round once or twice, and saw that my neighbour's thoughts were evidently far away. He was gazing abstractedly at the wall. He started when I spoke to him, and talked pleasantly enough afterwards, but he gave me the impression of a man with some heavy load upon his mind."

"He feels his position in the house, I suppose, and at the same time his immeasurable superiority to all the men here. I dread his allowing his sarcastic tongue to master his discretion. I was on thorns after dinner, when you ladies retired."

"I am very much pleased with the wife: she is so gentle and modest, and perfectly ladylike. Mrs. Bailey and Lady Katherine condescended to speak to her when we came into the drawing-

room. She was nervous, I am sure, but she bore their scrutiny so well, poor little woman! As to Mrs. Bailey, I feel as if I had passed a sleepless night after talking to her for half an hour. This pretty, modest little creature is a most refreshing contrast to *that* lady. It provokes me to think the husband should not look happier in the possession of such a wife."

"Whatever he *looks*, he is not a man to love lightly or to change. I remember a conversation we had about marriage once. He would not have married unless he had been desperately in love, I am sure; and having loved, it is for ever; at least, unless this Edgar Faulconbridge is altogether another man from the one I knew."

"Pray look at Mrs. Bailey," said Lady Trevelyan, a little later. "She is saying something very spiteful about Mrs. Faulconbridge at this moment, I know, from her face; because George is talking to your friend's wife instead of devoting himself to *her*. She has been singing her very best songs at him for the last half hour, to no effect."

"Arrant little coquette! I wish Stourton would talk to some one else, though, than Mrs. Faulconbridge all night."

"Yes; his avoidance of Lady Katherine is so marked, and annoys my uncle."

"Surely he has given up *that* idea? She has lost her beauty so much this year."

"Ah! you are like all men," said Lady Trevelyan, with a shake of the head. "But you are quite right about Sir Richard. He only keeps Lady Katherine now as a *corps de reserve*. The first favourite at present is Miss Lichfield; but George fancies her as little as the other girl. I must go and make one last effort to do as Sir Richard desires, and get up a round game. George declares he is tired, and won't stir. But unless something is 'done,' Sir Richard will give me a hint that we ought to retire."

She interrupted a very animated conversation on the ottoman. Mrs. Faulconbridge's shyness had gradually worn off, until she was now laughing with all a child's joyousness at some absurd description of George's. Lady Trevelyan felt her

task to be an ungracious one. It seemed to her too, as if the younger lady shrank back into her former shy manner, as she looked up and saw Lady Trevelyan beside her.

"It is nearly eleven o'clock, George."

"My dear Di, can't you leave one in peace? No one wants to play at any of those abominable games. You have a diseased idea that people cannot be happy of an evening, unless they are shovelling bits of pasteboard backwards and forwards, over a green baize cloth."

Lady Trevelyan was a prudent woman. She did not say, "It is you who are generally so eager for a game." She only observed, as she turned away,—

"It was your uncle's wish—not mine. You know I never play."

She was passing a table where Faulconbridge sat with his eyes fixed upon an old mezzo-tint.

"Do you sing, Mr. Faulconbridge?"

"I do not," he replied, rising. "I am afraid you will find that I am not of any use, Lady Trevelyan."

Is this affectation? thought she, or is this man's mind really diseased on one point? He appears to think that I mean him to entertain our guests. This morbid tetchiness is really intolerable. Shall I give him up at once, or try and soften this churlish nature?

"You are struck with that engraving. It is from a picture by Zoffany, of my grandmother and her family, which hangs in Sir Richard's morning-room."

"The mother's is a very charming face; not the least like the son's."

Their eyes met, and hers fell, but she answered,—"He is not supposed to resemble her in any way. She was a great musician—you see the harp near her—but the gift was not transmitted to my uncle. I don't think he is at all fond of music. Italian music he cannot bear."

"I am not surprised," said Faulconbridge, with a peculiar smile; "old English gentlemen are not partial to it generally, and I dare say Sir Richard has reminiscences of his youth to account for a more than common dislike to it."

"It often produces that effect on children who hear too much of it," said the lady. "My uncle never affected to like music. Do you like Mrs. Bailey's singing?"

"I've not heard her."

"The lady at the piano, I mean—who has been singing for the last hour."

"I was not listening: it didn't interest me. No woman with that face could sing."

"Her singing is very much admired, but I am no judge."

"You probably judge as I do, not by the perfection of execution, but by recognizing or not, under all those shakes and runs, the presence of a human soul. A face tells you beforehand what you may expect in this line."

"You cannot always judge Englishmen or women thus. It is often their pride to conceal all emotion—all sensibility. The face in that case is really a mask. Not long ago a lady said to me, 'I flatter myself I never show anything I feel before the world.' Yet that woman had plenty of real feeling."

"As long as she did nothing in public requiring the natural expression of emotion—*bene*. But no human being with any feeling can stand up and pretend to deliver in this apathetic way to a room-full of people something, the first condition of which is that heart and soul be thrown into it for the time being."

Lady Trevelyan shook her head. "You don't know what the paralysing effect of an audience is. I have seen those who really feel, and can express what they feel in private, become stiff and cold in public. I am afraid you will have evidence of that fact in these forthcoming plays."

"Do you act?"

"No. Though I do not *pride* myself on never exhibiting what I feel, I believe I have my share of this national repugnance to the exhibition of emotion—in myself, at least. I have no talent for public performance of any kind."

"It is strange," he said. "Who, to look at you and at my wife there, would fancy that she had the stronger nerves of the two? I believe

she will face any audience, because she becomes entirely absorbed in her part, and forgets everything else—while coming into this room three or four hours ago nearly killed her with fright."

"I am glad to see she has recovered from it."

She glanced towards Mrs. Faulconbridge; how pretty she looked as she sat there listening eagerly to George! There were none of those little returns to self-consciousness, that smoothing of the hair, and arranging of riband and tucker, of which the least vain women are often guilty in society, after being carried *out* of themselves in the excitement of the moment. They pull up short. Have they committed any indiscretion? Is no part of their attire discomposed? They can never forget themselves for long together. Mrs. Faulconbridge had nothing of this. As her shyness wore off a little, she looked at and admired things, and listened to all that was said with the absorbed interest and curiosity of a child. Like a child, too, she started back every now and then with a blush, and a little confusion of manner if any one addressed her;

but her beauty, perhaps, was less attractive (certainly less rare) than this unconsciousness of attraction, this absence of all thought about herself. I have no doubt she spent fully as much time as any other woman in adorning herself, but when she left the glass, there was an end of it; it troubled her head no more.

By and by, at a masonic sign from Sir Richard, Lady Trevelyan rises; and all the other ladies rise and begin to cluster round the door—except Mrs. Faulconbridge. With wide-open blue eyes, and a smile hovering upon her lips, she is so entirely absorbed in listening to Stourton, that she is unconscious of this, or any other move round her. One or two of the ladies give a little supercilious smile towards the ottoman as they approach the door. Then Lady Trevelyan turns back, and says gently, "We are going to bed, Mrs. Faulconbridge." The latter lady starts up, colouring all over; she turns to look for her husband, but he has sauntered into the adjoining library. She takes the candlestick which George hands to her, and they bow over it. He holds the door open,

and closes it behind Lady Trevelyan; and the men are left to themselves.

"Do you smoke?"—George had followed Faulconbridge into the next room—"because as soon as Sir Richard has retired we generally meet in the smoking-room, at the end of the passage, to the left. I'd advise you to change your coat. Sir Richard is awfully particular about the smell of 'baccy. He never could bear it, he says, even when he was a youngster, and now he is as particular as a lady, if the least vestige of the divine perfume lingers about one.'"

"Ah! Possibly, he compounded 'for sins he was inclined to, by damning those he had no mind to.' Is your uncle a severely virtuous old gentleman?"

George looked half inclined to smile, but thought better of it: even a shade of annoyance crossed his brow.

"I see you've heard all sorts of stories about Sir Richard. He's one of those men who has had what you call 'a reputation' in his day. A great deal, I dare say, is true, and a great deal

false. But whatever he *was*, I can only say what he is now, to me, Mr. Faulconbridge; very lenient to my many offences, and much more liberal than I deserve. If this is to be 'severely virtuous,' he is so."

The baronet and his elder guests had left the drawing-room: the younger ones now skulked up their respective staircases and passages to descend into the smoking-room some minutes later, clad in every species of eccentric garb.

The circle of young men, sprawled on ottomans and easy-chairs round the fire, were discussing their absent friends pretty freely, when Faulconbridge entered. One, Bob (whose surname never transpired), was under examination, and the trial to which he was subjected was severe, in proportion to the enormities he had committed.

"Got into a worse scrape than ever!" said Etheridge, drawing a long puff at his regalia, "and no getting him out of it, this time!"

"The deuce!" remarked Bailey. It was only when stimulated by great curiosity, that so brisk

an indication of interest was ever elicited from this individual.

"What is it about?" asked Stourton.

"Oh! a woman, of course. Bottom of everything. Always is. Been and married some woman without a penny, who got the blind side of him. Poor Bob! always was weak. His governor, of course, is in an awful state about it. All his gambling and horse-racing debts were nothing; but *this*—why, the fellow might as well have hanged himself at once!"

"It's the only good thing I ever heard of Bob's doing," observed George, quietly. "As to his racing debts, and so on, I should like to know who is to blame but his father, who brought him up in a stable, and encouraged, both by precept and example, all those tastes which have proved the ruin of his son? If the woman's of the right sort, the best possible thing that could happen to him, is that he should marry—even if she hasn't a penny."

"That's all very fine, my dear George, but how are they to live? Bob has a capital good seat

across country, and he could ride a flat-race once, —getting too fat already, and with an easy married life, it will soon be all over with him. He handles the ribbons very prettily, and he used, poor fellow, to be a fair shot, till he took to drinking so much brandy and water. That's the *catalogue raisonné* of Bob's accomplishments. Really I don't see how he can earn an honest penny, unless he goes out as a groom."

"Whose fault is that, I repeat again? His father never educated him for any profession. He is bound to support him."

"On the contrary, he disowns him. Considers he has disgraced his family, by marrying in the way he has done. Won't see him, or answer his letters."

"What an infernal shame!" exclaimed young Wilmot. "There was nothing against the woman, was there?"

"Oh, respectable enough, I believe, for that matter, but low. Quartermaster's daughter, or something of that sort."

"Probably much too good for him," said

Stourton. "His people ought only to be too glad that he hasn't fallen a prey to one of those French dancers he was always running after."

"She'd have had one pull over the present Mrs. Bob," said Granfield, with a low chuckle, as he announced his joke very slowly. "She'd have known what steps to take in all his difficulties; and when Bob was on his last legs, why, he might have taken to hers!"

"Turn him out!" laughed George. "His low jokes are only fit for the lobby of the House."

"It's no joke for Bob," said Etheridge, sinking further back into the cushions of his arm-chair, whence the cloud of smoke issued languidly from time to time—"no joke at all. How a man can be such a confounded ass as to make a *mésalliance* passes my limited comprehension. Some fellows really seem to think they're doing a very fine thing in marrying 'for love,' as they call it. Love, indeed! No patience with such stuff. All very well spooning before you're married, and that sort of thing; but in such a serious step for life as marriage is, there are other considerations infi-

nitely more important. One don't marry the *woman* only, as some fellows seem to think. Foreigners understand this kind of thing infinitely better, and make it entirely a matter of calm deliberation and arrangement."

"Bravo! Je vous reconnais là, mon ami!" exclaimed Stourton; "though I have seldom heard you so eloquent before. It is a pity so much oratory should be thrown away here, Eth, where, except Wilmot, none of us are sentimentally disposed, or likely to stand in need of your warnings."

"Well," said young Wilmot, pluckily, "it's all very fine; but I don't see why a man shouldn't marry any woman he likes, if there ain't anything against her. I've always understood that a man raises a woman to his station, whatever that is, and provided she behaves like a lady——"

"Ah! there you have it!" interrupted Etheridge, with cool impertinence, as he half closed his eyes. "People have such different ideas of what a lady is, as I told you only to-day. What your attorney considers a lady, you don't; and it's possible that some men might not accept *your*

standard. All a matter of class. Every clique has its own ideas on these subjects."

"And some of them very blackguard ones," observed Faulconbridge, composedly.

It was the first time he had addressed Etheridge; and for a moment the imperturbable guardsman was taken aback. He quickly recovered himself, however, and, with a slight increase of languor, replied—

"Ah! possibly! I only know one class personally myself."

"Well," said Wilmot, laying down his cigar, and leaning forward to triumph over his adversary, as he fondly hoped, poor, well-meaning boy! "Well, come now, there are women in this very exclusive set of yours, Etheridge, 'who adorn their station,' as books say, and who were certainly born in very inferior ones. Lady Hashbrook, for instance."

"Father drove his own cattle to Smithfield," observed Etheridge, yawning. "Perhaps that's the reason you get a better joint at her table than any house in London. Elle s'y connait."

"Well, I defy you to say she's not very lady-like, and a monstrous pleasant woman, too. Then there's Mrs. Hervey D'Alton——"

"—— Only daughter of a coach-builder in Long Acre," struck in the other.

"And one of the most popular women of the day," said Stourton. "No one gives such jolly little dinners as she does."

"Mere outsiders, both of them," pronounced the inexorable oracle, with a deprecating shake of the head. "They *are* let into society, but it's upon sufferance, and owing to peculiar circumstances."

"Is that another name for a long purse?" asked George. "That is the only 'peculiar circumstance' attached to both of them that I know of. Looking out for an heiress sounds snobbish. Henceforward I shall say, I'm looking out for a young lady with a 'peculiar circumstance' attached to her."

"I wish, my dear boy," laughed Bradley Ferrers, who had been enjoying his clay in silence hitherto, an amused auditor of the prattle of these

"boys," whom he regarded with something of a paternal air, "I wish you would act up to those noble principles, instead of shying like a two-year-old at all the eligible young women. The Bart. is getting quite unhappy about it."

"I'm not a marrying man, Ferrers. At all events, I mean to see a great deal more of life before I 'settle,' as it's called. It very often *is* a settler. You see, I've not quite arrived at the superb God-like calmness of our friend Eth here: perhaps ten years hence I may approximate to it; but at present I've an invincible dislike to have such matters arranged for me. I've endeavoured, over and over again, to convey that in a mild form to my respected uncle, but to very little purpose, I'm afraid."

"Why didn't your respected uncle set you a better example, and marry himself, Georgy?" said Granfield.

"'Pon my word, I don't know. You'd better ask him. But as *you* can't plead the want of good example, Louis, there is no excuse for your determined bachelorhood. You're nearly six years

older than I am, and ought to have been presenting a yearly olive-branch to the house of Granfield for some time past."

Granfield good-humouredly joined in the laugh against himself, which was not diminished by his saying—

"If women would only propose to one, I don't believe there would be a single old maid left in the civilized world. That proposing is the very deuce! Many a man like myself, I'm sure, is left to wither on his virgin stem for want of some enterprising female hand to pluck and wear him."

Here Bailey startled every one by exclaiming—

"'Uncommonly true! by Jove! *uncommonly* true!'" and the energy with which this burst of eloquence was delivered could not but suggest to the mind of his amused auditors that had it not been for such enterprise on Mrs. Bailey's part, the gallant captain would never have been chained to her chariot wheels.

Soon after this Faulconbridge rose. Save those few words addressed to Etheridge, he had taken no part in the conversation; but he had not been an

inattentive listener. A little of it, however, went a long way. He was tired, and felt the necessity for solitude, if not for sleep, after a day of novel emotion and strange excitement. With a general "good-night" to the circle round the fire, he took his candle, and re-trod his way back to his own tower.

On reaching his wife's room, he stopped, listened, and knocked gently. No answer came, and he opened the door softly. The outer room was in darkness, as was the bedchamber within, the door of which stood ajar. The black silk gown she had taken off hung up near the door; the little satin shoes stood beside a chair, on which sundry articles of female attire were laid. His eye glanced round, and then, as he listened and caught the soft breathing that rose and fell at regular intervals, from the adjoining room, he murmured:

"Tired out! In bed and asleep already. Poor child! Thank God! she knows nothing of all the wrath and bitterness which makes riot in my heart. I will not disturb her. Let her sleep on. Why should I trouble her young spirit with a

knowledge of the truth? Time enough for that; my secret is only mine so long as it remains locked in my own heart. I am not expansive, luckily. I have never made a confidant in my life of any man; and as to women, they are too frail and delicate caskets to be receptacles for any such weighty matters. Least of all, would I charge this one, my poor Nina, with a painful burthen, unless it become absolutely necessary that she share it with me."

He had slowly mounted the stone stair to his own upper apartment, as these thoughts traversed his brain; and the young husband locked himself into his solitary room, to lie down, indeed, but not to sleep for many a long and weary hour

CHAPTER VII.

THE REHEARSAL.

It is not my intention to follow every separate little event in the days which succeeded. I have described what passed the first evening after the Faulconbridges' arrival, because the first impression which strangers, whose lives henceforward are to intersect each other, mutually make is never unimportant. But I must not overtask the reader's indulgence by describing all the detached conversations which were carried on at Stourton Towers between our various *dramatis personæ* during their stay there. I shall pass over the day following that first evening, with only a few words. The greater part of the morning was passed by Faulconbridge in discussion with George Stourton, and advice relative to the forthcoming play. There was, of

course, a diversity of opinions upon every possible subject connected with it. Faulconbridge's decision was given *ex cathedrâ*, and no one rebelled against it. He showed, good-naturedly enough, to all who applied to him, what his idea of their various parts was. He took infinite pains to make one or two of them less stilted and unnatural in their mode of delivery. And public opinion seemed to be unanimous that evening that he was decidedly a very valuable acquisition. An odd young man, no doubt, by no means generally agreeable, but evidently very clever, and possessed of that masterful quality of mind which makes all bend before it. Lady Trevelyan was as puzzled as ever. Upon the whole she thought she did not like him, and was inclined to prefer his retiring wife.

Sir Richard, having once decided that Mrs. Faulconbridge was a very pretty woman, of course thought it but natural that George should amuse himself by flirting a little with the actress, for whom he was to feign such desperate love. He had always held the opinion that the reputation of being *un homme à bonnes fortunes* was decidedly

no disadvantage to a man in society—rather the contrary. It would not militate against him in the eyes of the many fair ladies who were disposed favourably to regard the young heir of Stourton Towers. So, at least, his uncle thought, and if he did not know the world, who should? He wished most anxiously that George should seriously incline to one of the many matrimonial speculations which he offered him; but if he would *not*, at this moment, why, flirting with a woman of this sort was, of course, better than being drawn into a *mésalliance*.

And George certainly showed from that first night forwards a very decided preference for Mrs. Faulconbridge's society over that of all the other ladies now at Stourton Towers. Having overcome her first shyness with him, she never completely went back, as she did with nearly every one else, to that condition of embarrassment and timidity in which she had entered the house. Lady Trevelyan was very kind, but she never found that she made any way with the young actress. Still she did not give up trying; she

occasionally drew out some observations from Mrs. Faulconbridge which showed that she had plenty of intelligence; but an invincible shyness seemed to freeze up her capacity for conversation when that tall, grand-looking woman approached her. Miss Skipton was the only other one who tried, and she succeeded better. At present, however, so far as we have gone in our story, on the second morning after her arrival, Mrs. Faulconbridge looked still ill at ease among the general company. It was only when George had talked to her for some little time that she thawed, as she had done the first night, and the bright, keen, eager look bore down every other expression in her face.

At eleven o'clock the *corps dramatique* was to meet for rehearsal at the Stourbridge Theatre. Punctually at that hour Faulconbridge and Bradley Ferrers walked into the dingy little building, which George Stourton had rightly described as being redolent of gas and orange-peel. Faded, moreover, and ghastly it looked in the light of day, and the scenery was now so innocent of all

deception, that it was difficult to believe that the patched and tattered canvas could ever represent the marble palace or the sylvan haunt to the eye of the most imaginative child.

The two young men had walked over from the Castle, and found themselves, as they expected, the first arrivals. Mrs. Whitehead and a daughter, who drove from the other side of Stourbridge, came next. The former was a fat, excellent old body, with a rich unctuous voice, and some sense of humour. The daughter was almost equally fat and excellent, but without the voice or the humour. She was to fill the walking parts of Janet and the maid, for which she was found wholly inadequate, by reason of her always getting on the wrong side of the stage, and being invariably in everybody's way.

"Only you here, Mr. Ferrers?" said the elder lady. "Well, I'm glad we're in such good time." The ceremony of Faulconbridge's introduction having been gone through, she went on: "You're the gentleman who are going to assist us, I believe? I'm the Widow, you know. I haven't

got a great deal to say, but the part, I feel, has a good deal of responsibility attached to it, and I shall feel much obliged to you for any hint. I was saying to my daughter as I came along, I haven't acted since I was twenty, and then I was supposed to have some disposition for it; —and I daresay now I am too old and stupid. But to oblige Mr. Stourton, you know, (and he is such a charming young man! always makes the neighbourhood alive,) I consented to do my best. He was good enough to say I should give them all an air of respectability; and to say the truth, without some matron, neither of the young ladies could have appeared."

Thus she ran on for a quarter of an hour; at the end of which time one of the Stourton carriages, containing Mrs. Faulconbridge, Miss Skipton, and George, appeared. The two ladies seemed to have already struck up a friendship—as women only can, in the course of half an hour. The spinster, as we have seen, was fully prepared for this; her enthusiastic temperament gushed over with admiration for the beautiful

young actress; and the latter in the warmth and joyousness of her nature, responded quickly to the kindness shown her.

To them appeared Mr. Wraggles, proprietor of the theatre, himself an actor of small dimensions and uncertain English: bland in manner, conceited in talk, and rusty in habiliment.

"Those other fellows not come yet?" cried George, springing up the steps of the theatre. "Confound them. I knew how it would be; keeping the ladies waiting here. Is the right scene set up? Mr. Wraggles, *have* you nothing better in the shape of a garden than that row of gallipots, with cabbages stuck in them? seen from 'the open window.' It *is* open with a vengeance! What a room! And as to reclining on that sofa, Mrs. Faulconbridge, you'll never be able to do it. We must get some furniture sent down from the Castle. I had no idea it looked quite so dingy by daylight. The other night, when we came over to see the theatre, they had that same drop-scene in the *Stranger*, and it really looked quite tidy then. Mr. Wraggles,

where's my cottage? Have your men made the practicable staircase yet? Have you given that 'attempt at refinement' which, according to the stage instructions, my cottage is to have? I won't have that cut-throat-looking place, which the Yorkshireman called his '*woame*,' the other night in the *Cure for the Heart-ache*."

"That, sir, is the true sylvan cottage. But anythink else you prefer may be substituted; perhaps the cottage *horné*, sir, that we 'ave for the romantic bliss scenes? For true refinement there's nothink like that. As to this room-scene, sir, we can give you the *Castle Spectre* interior *if* you prefer it; but the directions is, an '*ouse* in Lyons. An '*ouse*, you'll remark, ain't a castle. With just a stitch here and there, and a touch of paint, this 'ere can be made to look as good as new. Romer and 'Arrison sung to this very scene in the *Bohemian Gurl* last year; and drew —bless me, 'ow they did draw! Never knew Stourbridge 'ad such a soul for music before."

"These, then, no doubt, are the identical 'marble halls' which Arline dreamt about?"

laughed George. "Come, Faulconbridge, take the prompter's book, we won't wait for these fellows, but go on to the third scene."

"Oh, please Mr. Faulconbridge," said Miss Skipton, who was walking up and down the stage, her part in one hand, while she covered it with the other, and repeated it to herself over and over again with nervous agony, "Oh, please, tell me how I'm to say this. I'm so frightened, I know I shall break down. It's so dreadful having to begin. Mrs. Faulconbridge, don't you think you *could* say something first, just to give me courage. All that about your *tournure*, and *je ne sais quoi*, is so very difficult."

"I should think that might very well be missed," said Nina Faulconbridge, smiling.

"Here they are, at last!" exclaimed George. "Now let us begin at once. Pretty fellows you are! More than half-past eleven. Come, Etheridge, you can't be learning your part now, you have to come in immediately."

"Off there to the left flat, gentlemen, if you please," said Faulconbridge, assuming the autho-

rity of manager. "Miss Whitehed, to the right of this table; Miss Skipton, your chair a little further off. Fill the stage a little better. Don't be afraid, and speak as loud as you can. Now, down with the curtain, which rises at the prompter's bell."

A hopeless business enough it seemed, that first scene. Etheridge, as Beauséant, scarcely knew a line of his part, and poor Miss Skipton, who really had learnt hers, in her trepidation forgot it. Granfield, who enacted Damas, the bluff soldier, knew what he had to say, and said it; but, as George expected, with so broad a Buckstonian manner, that Faulconbridge plainly told him, if he persisted in it, the duel scene would be rendered a farce.

"Be natural—a little loud and blustering, if you will—but above everything, your natural voice and pronunciation. That extravagant intonation may do for Messrs. Box or Cox, but not for a French general of the Empire."

"I can't be natural; I shall lose all my pluck, if I try to be. I'm the shyest man under the

sun; but when I'm on the stage, disguised and under cover of an assumed manner, I have brass enough. If you deprive me of my wig and my wrinkles, and my stage manner into the bargain, then I am bereft, indeed!" he exclaimed, with a comical air of despondency.

But Wilmot, as Glavis, promised even less well. The part is not a very important one: still there the character stands, with a certain number of small speeches to deliver. These were wholly inaudible. The bold, free and easy young soldier became afflicted simultaneously with a weakness in the voice and knees, and while he cast down his eyes, or threw them furtively off at the side scenes, the disposition of his arms and legs was unfortunate in the extreme.

"Speak up, man!" cried George, from the centre box of the theatre, where all, save Faulconbridge, were playing audience.

"I can't," bellowed Wilmot, evincing a perfect mastery over his lungs.

"Don't keep your arms so stiff. Disengage your leg a little more. Present a better face

to the house," were Faulconbridge's whispered instructions.

"I've no other face," said the young actor, disconsolately; "and as to my leg, what am I to do with it?"

"There—never mind now, you shall come and rehearse in my room quietly. We will go through it all. Now third scene! Melnotte's cottage. Where's the scene-shifter? Come, look alive. The widow Melnotte, here Mrs. Whitehed, here you stand! Claude outside the door. I'm the populace, shouting, "Long live Claude Melnotte!"

This scene was capitally rehearsed. From the moment he stepped on to the stage, it was easy to see that George Stourton had a natural gift for acting. He moved easily and gracefully; he spoke clearly; he threw himself with considerable spirit into the part of Claude. Mrs. Whitehed made a capital Widow Melnotte, and Gaspar's speeches were faithfully delivered by Bradley Ferrers, who, to the small part of Pauline's father, had added those of the yet smaller fry through-

out the play, who come on once and then for ever disappear.

In the second act, Mrs. Faulconbridge, whose powers had been so far paralyzed at first by those with whom she was acting, that she did no more than read her part correctly, "came out strong," as the young men expressed it, in the scene with Claude. She gave her speeches with great tenderness, and showed a delicate perception of the influence of love on such a nature as Pauline's. This was of course still more strongly indicated throughout the concluding portions of the play, and in spite of the disadvantages under which she laboured, she managed to make this felt by all: possibly, most of all by the man who was supposed to be the object of this gradual and absorbing passion.

"Fust rate!" exclaimed Mr. Wraggles enthusiastically to Faulconbridge. "That'll bring down the gallery, as sure as my name's Wraggles! That's your sort for Injured Innocence, sir; only she don't know yet how to 'laugh wildly.' To laugh wildly is an art in itself. Ever see Miss

O'Corkell, sir? *She* was the woman to laugh wildly. That woman's laugh, sir, have made my bones creep. Starred it here for twopunten a week in the *Bleeding Magician!* This here lady would get twopunten a week easy, that she would, if she had O'Corkell's voice."

"Why, can't you hear her?" asked Faulconbridge.

"*Hear* her? That ain't the point, bless you! She hasn't got the stage pitch. Sweet young lady, and her eyes are worth any money. She knows what she is about, too—fills the stage beautiful. But it's all too natural. She talks as if she was in a drawink-room. Why, I should like to know what would become of the stage if we was all to talk like that?"

"What indeed!" returned the other.

"'Twould degenerate, sir, into familiarity—and we know what familiarity breeds. Mr. Stourton has a pretty idea of his part—very pretty; but again, vastly too natural! No idea of the Proprieties!"

"None whatever!" said Faulconbridge, demurely.

"Looks as if he entirely forgot the audience—was entirely engrossed with the lady. Against all precedent—all tradition. Knelt on his wrong leg, too: a gross violation of the law, sir! But without Education, and a knowledge of the Proprieties, no man can be an actor."

As every question has two sides, it was worth while listening to the group opposite, of which Miss Skipton was the most voluble speaker.

"Really something too charming—too lovely! Quite a *creation*, don't you think so, Mr. Ferrers? Colonel Etheridge, *do* say something. I'm sure you think she's a perfect angel, now, *don't* you?"

"I have but a slight acquaintance with angels," said the guardsman, feeling if the gummed points of his moustaches were all right. "They must be very demonstrative if they are like that lady. It may be splendid acting, for all I know, but it ain't natural, all that exaggerated sentiment and gesticulation, at least not in society, whatever it may be in Mrs. Faulconbridge's class. As to Stourton, I should find it difficult to account for an exhibition so unlike his usual demeanour, if it

wasn't a recognized fact that the more gentleman-like your amateur actor is *off* the boards, the less so he is when *on*, in nine cases out of ten. It generally takes the phase of low buffoonery, as in Granfield; but with a *jeune premier*, like Stourton, it takes a fervid form, still more objectionable in its endeavour to be captivating, because so utterly removed from the manners of our daily life. Fancy a man making love to a woman in that way! Pooh!"

"I can fancy it very well," said Wilmot, who came up during the latter speech; then added, laughing, "and if you ask me, I should say George was not entirely acting in giving utterance to his expressions of warm admiration for the lady. *I* never saw him so smitten with any woman before. Look at him now, how he is watching her. *That's* not acting, take my word for it."

"Oh! Mr. Wilmot, don't be absurd!" said Miss Skipton. "You men, I never heard anything like you. You are far more jealous than we women are, and then you never can allow any one to admire any one else, but they're immediately

'in love.' Not but what I'm sure it wouldn't be surprising if you were all in love with that sweet creature. Luckily, the husband's a dangerous-looking man, not to be trifled with, I'm sure! He! he!"

"You are right," said Ferrers, gravely, and he had taken no part in the conversation hitherto; "Faulconbridge is *not* a man to be trifled with. He likes his wife to be admired, and her talent for acting appreciated, but if ever his jealousy be really roused he will be a very Othello, you may depend on it."

"Don't doubt it," observed Etheridge; "just what I should expect. An actor's ideas on such matters would probably be taken from some stage hero, who would become his standard of proper behaviour in like circumstances. A great deal of the rant and feather-bed business, stopping, perhaps, just short of the murder, in conformity with modern ideas. He'd do the part to perfection."

"He does most things to perfection that he attempts," said Ferrers, still with unusual gravity. "He is a first-rate shot and a capital fencer.

Nothing is half and half with him, and—in private life at least—there is no sham or assumption about Faulconbridge. He is only too free-spoken, and sometimes sarcastic, to be altogether agreeable. Those who imagine that, because he is studying for the stage, he is always 'doing a part,' may find themselves unpleasantly mistaken."

So saying he walked away. He had thought it well to take this opportunity of enlightening the young men somewhat as to the character of the individual they were discussing. Secretly, however, he did not feel as assured as he would fain have appeared upon the subject of Faulconbridge's wife. He knew George Stourton well, no one better. He knew that Wilmot had only said the truth, when he remarked that never before had George expressed such open and unmistakeable admiration for any woman, married or single. She might be a most virtuous and estimable person, or she might not: he knew nothing of her. But, in either case, this fancy of George's might lead to a most painful and serious complication, in which he, Ferrers, as

the husband's friend, would be implicated. All he had said of Faulconbridge was strictly what he believed to be the truth; and however tolerant the latter might show himself now of the admiration his wife excited, Ferrers felt sure that at the first hint of anything beyond this, his violence would be uncontrollable. It seemed absurdly premature to indulge any fears or conjectures on the subject: the Faulconbridges had not been here three days yet! But the shrewd lawyer resolved, nevertheless, to keep his eyes open. If it were really true that there was danger for his friend's wife, no less than for George, he, Bradley Ferrers, felt himself in a measure responsible, and bound to avert it, if possible.

The rehearsal lasted till past three o'clock. Many of the scenes had to be repeated more than once: in all there were stoppages, stage directions, and rectifications, of which those who have not been subjected to a similar ordeal, can hardly understand the tedium. The inaptitude of the greater part of the company for the task

they had undertaken, rendered this (let us hope) even worse than the average of amateur rehearsals. Granfield's grotesque misconception of his part, Etheridge's languid indifference, Wilmot's incapacity, and Miss Skipton's nervous persistence in giving every one the wrong cue, were obstacles that constantly arose to impede the advancement of the play. At the end of the third hour, every one's patience and benevolence were oozing rapidly away; except in the case of the hero and heroine, who preserved the dramatic unities of their situation by appearing neither bored nor tired.

But let us close this chapter, lest our description become as tedious as the rehearsal itself. By way of postcript, I will only add the words dropped by two speakers into Bradley Ferrers' ear, less as characteristic of the men themselves than of the spirit this wearisome trial engendered. Etheridge came up yawning, and stretching his arms abroad in a spasm of fatigue.

"I shall die of it, if this goes on another half-hour. My life is already shortened by at

least a year, I feel it. Did you ever see such a muff as that fellow, Wilmot? Horrid bore having to act with such a simpleton," (a yawn) "and all my scenes" (another yawn) "are with him!"

Here the guardsman became positively speechless in a chromatic scale of yawns, and Ferrers left him. Two minutes later, Wilmot caught his button-hole.

"I say, Ferrers, what on earth are we to do with that conceited ass, Etheridge? Doesn't know a word of his part—quite puts me out, he does! I should get on well enough, I know I should, if I'd any other fellow to rehearse with, but all my speeches are with him, and he never gives me the right cue, and—oh! it's disgusting, and he is so infernally cool, and impertinent too."

CHAPTER VIII.

SOCIAL AFFINITIES.

THE carriage had been dismissed; the party were to walk back to the castle. Louis Granfield, Etheridge, and Wilmot set forth at a sharper pace than the rest, and were soon out of sight. Mrs. Faulconbridge and Miss Skipton were deep in a discussion which only women could understand, relative to their respective toilettes for the play. George Stourton was detained in giving some necessary directions to Mr. Wraggles, and would overtake them, he said. Bradley found himself walking alone alongside of Edgar Faulconbridge, and after his recent grave reflections, he could scarcely help starting when the latter said suddenly,—

"Tell me something of this young Stourton, you know him well?"

"Yes, I have known him ever since he was a boy."

"He was brought up at Eton, and he is in the Army. I know so much: but tell me something of his character. Does it resemble his uncle's in any way? Is he unprincipled, cold, cruel, and selfish?"

Bradley glanced up at his friend in surprise. The younger man's brow was knit, and his eyes bent upon the dead leaves through which their feet brushed.

"My dear fellow, before I answer your question, let me repeat the warning I gave you on your arrival."

"I am only quoting your own description, Ferrers."

"Well, Faulconbridge, all I said was that Sir Richard had led the life of a Sybarite. Let me beg you, at all events while you remain here, to refrain from speaking of him with such acrimony. The old complaint against you, Faulconbridge! Too impetuous by half. Things mustn't be characterized by their right names always in

this world. Your tongue, both for sarcasm and for censure, ought to undergo the training of an old stager like myself. You will get into hot water, if not. . . . I take the privilege of my ten years' seniority, you see, to lecture you still, as I used in the old Bonn days. Now, to answer your question. George is very much what you see him. He wears his character on his sleeve, so to speak. Frank, honourable, and kind-hearted, with good principles, though," he added, with a little hesitation, "I will not undertake to say that he may always be able to resist temptation if it comes in his way. In that respect he is probably like most other young men. But George is not vicious. The world may spoil him in the course of time—it is trying its very best, but at present he is an honest, true-hearted young fellow."

"Is he very susceptible? Given to falling frantically in love—and out again as quickly? or to breaking the hearts of designing damsels, by a succession of flirtations?"

Ferrers winced again.

"He is *not* susceptible—certainly not. His uncle is anxious for him to marry. Unfortunately, George's ideas and Sir Richard's on the subject are never likely to agree."

"He is an orphan, I think," said Faulconbridge, after a pause.

"Yes, and has scarcely a relation left but Sir Richard and Lady Trevelyan. His father was Sir Richard's younger brother—many years younger—and no two men could possibly be more dissimilar. He was a conscientious, hard-working clergyman: very poor, with a small living in Devonshire, a wife, and an only child—this boy. His brother (Colonel Stourton, he then was,) led the life of a man of the world, and had never married. The contrast, in all ways, was complete. George lost his father and mother within a year of each other. He was then about twelve. His uncle, who had succeeded to the baronetcy and estates, by the failure of direct heirs to his elder brother, was left the boy's sole guardian. Thus, from being the son of a poor parson, without other expectation than that of working for his bread in some laborious

profession, George suddenly found himself the heir to a title and great wealth. Since then, the world has done all it can to spoil him, as I have already said. Sir Richard took a fancy to the lad from the very first; spared no expense in his education, no pains to get him well started, according to *his* views in life; and his pride has fostered his affection, no doubt, as the boy has grown into a handsome man, of agreeable manners, of a lively wit, and possessed of the secret of making himself universally popular—these being the qualities Sir Richard sets most store by."

They walked on in silence some way.

"This Lady Trevelyan," said Faulconbridge, turning round, at last, in his sudden way; "who is she? The woman impresses me. I can't get rid of her face. She is not cast in the mould of this Stourton race. How is she his niece?"

"Simply because her mother was Sir Richard's only sister. She takes after her father's family, however, rather than her mother's. The wise, well-balanced judgment; the harmony of the whole woman, without a flaw or crack to mar its complete

soundness, are rare indeed! She is one in a thousand, Faulconbridge."

The fervour with which Bradley spoke drew something like a smile from the younger man. Was it possible that the lawyer, excellent, clever, agreeable as he was,—a valuable counsellor, a pleasant companion, a staunch friend, yet, withal, ill-favoured by nature even unto grotesqueness of appearance,—was it possible that *he* could aspire to the heart of that woman, whom he had described as "one in a thousand?"

When he spoke again, it was upon some indifferent subject. Let us fall back, and glean what we can from the conversation of the group behind.

"Pink for the first act, did you say? My grey, then, will do beautifully—quite the right foil to pink. I hope you don't dress *style de l'Empire*, though? Trying, very! Even you, Mrs. Faulconbridge, with your lovely figure; and think of me—ah!"

Mrs. Faulconbridge laughed gaily. She seemed now quite at her ease with the gushing spinster.

"The audience would look on it as a piece of

pedantry," she said, "if we were to make frights of ourselves by way of being so *very* correctly dressed! I quite agree with you, Miss Skipton. And, then, it would be a tacit insult to the scenery, which has very little *couleur locale* (or, indeed, any other colour!) For my part, I have made my gown a sort of a compromise between Henrietta Maria's and the last fashion from Paris. In short, let us forget that we are acting under 'the Empire,' and commit every sort of anachronism, provided we look our very best."

"Permit me to applaud that sentiment," laughed George, coming up to them at the same moment. "I haven't the faintest conception of what you are talking about, but I'm all for women looking their very best, no matter what the consequences are."

"Consequences? He! he! That would do for the game, you know, Mr. Stourton, we played the other night; what was it? About somebody and some other person, somewhere doing something, and the consequences were something quite absurd. He! he! something quite irrelevant!"

"Hardly more so than the consequences in real

life," replied George, with a twinkling eye; "Mrs. Masham's basin of water changing the destinies of Europe, to wit. Many a man's fate in life has been determined by his walking on one side of a street instead of the other. It's impossible to fore-calculate consequences—fortunately. I knew a man who lost a fortune from his choosing white soup instead of brown. Who shall say, Miss Skipton, what the consequences of our theatricals may not be? Granfield, in a moment of excitement, fired with the Dutch courage which acting gives him, may propose to little Fanny Whitehed; who knows? Even our imperturbable swell, Etheridge, may find himself engaged before the evening is over. Whatever he says can hardly be without *consequence*, at all events."

"Ah! very good. Well, but, Mr. Stourton, it will be expected that you will set the example. All the young ladies are waiting anxiously. There's Lady Katherine——"

"I'm not a marrying man," said the heir of the Stourtons, quickly. "And when I have managed to persuade my friends of the fact, they

will leave off troubling themselves and me on the subject."

"Now, take care, Mr. Stourton: take care! Don't you think that is a most ominous speech, Mrs. Faulconbridge? A man is never in so much danger as when he announces he is never going to marry."

"You would not doubt Mr. Stourton's word?" said the other lady, smiling archly. "You must therefore be something of a fatalist, Miss Skipton."

"I don't know. Well; yes, perhaps I am—about marriage. Is it very shocking? Whether or no, men are never to be believed about these sort of things. I dare say your husband said just the same the day before he proposed to you."

Mrs. Faulconbridge coloured. But she took no notice of the spinster's lively sally, and appeared not to hear it.

"Let us come across the park this way," said George. "It is a little longer, but we get a fine view. By-the-by, do you ride, Mrs. Faulconbridge? That is the only way of seeing a great deal of this country. The riding over those hills

yonder is splendid, and unfortunately there is no carriage-road."

"I have never ridden anything but a mule or a donkey," she replied. "Not that I am the least nervous, or should feel afraid; for a mule once tried to kick me off, and I kept my seat, they told me, very well. But ladies don't ride much in Italy, where I was principally brought up, and I never had the opportunity of riding on horseback."

"If you're not afraid, it can easily be managed, I dare say, then. My cousin Di's horse is as quiet as a lamb; and I'm sure she will be delighted to lend it to you. Let me see: we might make up a riding-party on Monday, when some of the rest of our corps are rehearsing their farces, and we shan't be wanted. I'd take you through Coombe Vale, and over the Stourton Downs, and home by ——"

"It is very kind of you to suggest it," said Mrs. Faulconbridge; "but you forget that I have no habit; and, besides, I am not sure that Mr. Faulconbridge would like it. I am here, you

must remember," she added, smiling, "in a professional capacity, and I dare say it would not be right for me to be running about the country amusing myself."

"As to the habit," said Miss Skipton, eagerly, "that's easily settled, for you and I are just of a size, and I'm sure you could wear my habit. It might be rather large in the waist, but if you get a pleasant ride, you won't mind that?"

"Your other objection, that you ought not to enjoy yourself," said George, "puts me in mind of my walking in the streets of Edinburgh on a Sunday with a Scotch friend of mine. He pulled me up for laughing. 'You musn't do that,' he said, 'or the people here will think we are walking *to amuse ourselves*.' Now, why on earth, Mrs. Faulconbridge, you shouldn't enjoy yourself on Monday afternoon because you rehearse that evening and twice the following day, and probably again the next morning, having to act that evening and the next; why you shouldn't invigorate yourself by a couple of hours' exercise in the fresh air, is past my comprehension."

"I am sure I should enjoy it very much," she said, hesitatingly. "And it is very kind of you, Miss Skipton; but, in short, I must leave it to Mr. Faulconbridge to decide."

Every one must have remarked how rapidly in a large country-house a sympathy between certain ingredients of the society, or the reverse, manifests itself. Often on the very first day of the party's assembling, this mesmeric attraction is seen, drawing together total strangers, or inspiring them with mutual repulsion. At the end of the second day they have broken up into several distinct coteries; and nearly always will be found in one or two couples, whose places seem to fall naturally beside each other, in the walk and at the dinner-table. It never seems to be a matter of pre-arrangement; on the contrary, the almost inevitable result of accident; only, unlike other accidents, you may safely stake very long odds upon its repetition every day, while the same guests are under one roof.

The party assembled at Stourton Towers formed no exception to this rule. That day at dinner

the guests occupied very nearly the same places they had done on the first evening. 'Elective affinities' grew stronger, and elective *antipathies* in proportion. Lady Katherine's jealousy of the young actress, who now engrossed all George Stourton's attention, was as undisguised as that young gentleman's admiration of Mrs. Faulconbridge. Lady Trevelyan and Miss Skipton were indeed the only women who could be said to share the latter sentiment, and to express it without drawback or reservation. Lady Julia, it is true, said nothing, and good old Lady Granfield only remarked that "she seems a sweet young person, and—it's a pity," a sentiment which, assuming the ambiguous phrase to mean more than its words implied, most of the ladies certainly did not share. There was very little "pity" blent with their judgment of pretty Mrs. Faulconbridge. The party had increased, and Monday was to bring another accession of numbers.

With none of these, however, need we trouble ourselves, as they in no way intersect our story, and only went to swell the chorus, as it were,

that ranged itself on one side or the other. The men were unanimous, or nearly so, in their admiration of Mrs. Faulconbridge. Some of the women thought her—oh, so lovely! only—really *such* a way of going on for a married woman! The rest were mostly *dénigrantes* or satirical. Her hair was red, her gown was badly made, her slight foreign accent was an abominable and vulgar drawl, her pocket handkerchiefs were so dreadfully coarse, no wonder her nose got red!

Nothing of this sort, however, seemed to affect the young wife, though there were moments when her brow clouded, and she looked ill at ease. She could hardly be blind to the fact that most of the women kept aloof from her, and that their tone in speaking to her was chillingly civil. Lady Katherine was the only one who could be said to be otherwise, but even her occasional rudeness only caused the blood to rise for an instant into the actress's face. It was not in her nature to be disturbed by such elements as these, apparently, or she had fortified herself well against them, which was more than her husband had done.

Several times in the course of that evening and the following one, Bradley Ferrers watched his friend's face with painful anxiety, as he perceived that some chance chord had been struck in conversation which irritated him. At such moments his wife looked apprehensive and uncomfortable, and more especially so as she observed him replying with some impatience to a question the pompous baronet vouchsafed to address to him. At other times she seemed quite inclined to yield to the pleasant influence of the society in which she found herself, and float down the sunny stream of the hour, careless whither it might lead. Innocence, good spirits, and quick sympathies, all tend to overthrow the barriers of reserve, and have a special grace and charm which is denied to the wisdom of more cautious speakers. However justly Mrs. Faulconbridge might draw down upon herself the animadversions of her own sex by the pleasure she openly showed in George's conversation, this entire naturalness, this absence of all conventional affectations, formed one of her chief attractions in his eyes.

There was one change in Edgar Faulconbridge that evening which Bradley observed with pleasure. The former was more like himself than he had yet appeared in conversation with Lady Trevelyan. No one, as Ferrers knew, could be more agreeable than his friend when he chose. Apparently now he did choose; the consummation which the barrister had wished to bring about seemed in a fair way of fulfilment, as he saw the young man's perfect ease of manner, and watched the earnestness with which he talked to that wise, true-hearted woman who might become his best friend.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. PENDARVES AND HER VISITOR.

MRS. PENDARVES sat in solemn state in her own sitting-room: not that public apartment designated as the "housekeeper's," but a more private sanctuary, into which none but the specially invited dared penetrate. The day was Sunday: the hour dusk: the privileged guests were two. First, Mr. Roundel, the parish clerk, who belied any idea of jollity his name might suggest, being a mild man in rusty black, with weak eyes, and generally an earthy smell about him. It was whispered that he was occasionally addicted to strong waters, which might account for the stationary redness in his nose, and the obsequious, almost reverential, homage with which he treated Mrs. Pendarves, that lady's cherry-brandy enjoying a well-deserved

There was one change in Edgar Faulconbridge this evening which Bradley observed with pleasure. The former was more like himself than he had yet appeared in conversation with Lady Trevelyan. No one, as Ferrers knew, could be more agreeable than his friend when he chose. Apparently now he did choose; the consummation which the barrister had wished to bring about seemed in a fair way of fulfilment, as he saw the young man's perfect ease of manner, and watched the earnestness with which he talked to that wise, true-hearted woman who might become his best friend.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. PENDREVIS AND HER VISITOR.

Mrs. Pendrevis sat in solemn state in [illegible]
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reputation. Mr. Roundel was not quite fifty, though his appearance might have indicated more, and he had not filled his present post above twelve years; he was, in short, a mere infant in Mrs. Pendarves' eyes, whose nearly twenty years' additional experience of the world enabled her to treat the views of her visitor with a lofty superiority. Not that they were very positive, and at the most rather implied than announced, while he served, like the stage-confidant in old plays, to draw out the anecdotes or the opinions of his venerated hostess.

The third occupant of the sanctuary just now could hardly be called a guest, inasmuch as she was Mrs. Pendarves' niece and constant companion, without whom, it was her aunt's belief, she could not continue to undertake the arduous duties of her position. This was Mrs. Pendarves' one hallucination, and it was a pardonable one. A clear-headed and still able-bodied woman, going through the round of her daily work with undiminished activity, she remained obstinately blind to the fact that Jemima was a most useless little

member of society. No: she chose to consider her the staff of her declining years: the crop of well-oiled curls, the greasy novel, and the dirty bit of embroidery never undeceived her; neither did the girl's inaptitude to add two and two, nor her incapacity to remember in preserve-making the quantity of sugar necessary for so many pounds of fruit. Jemima's chief occupation during the week was to hunt for a missing bunch of keys, which she had always "just laid down," and the nearest approach to severity Mrs. Pendarves ever manifested towards her niece was when this search was protracted beyond ordinary limits. And yet Sir Richard Stourton's housekeeper was almost as awful a person in her own way as Sir Richard himself: nay, she might be considered more so, inasmuch as the baronet treated her with marked consideration and respect. Mrs. Pendarves' word was law. She had reigned forty-three years in the room where we find her sitting, and previous to that she had been lady's maid to Sir Richard's mother. She was two or three years his junior, but she wore her years far better than he did. No

one who heard Mrs. Pendarves' active, though weighty, step, or saw her vigilant eye detect a speck of dust in the remotest corner of the room —no one could call her superannuated. A more shrewd and efficient superintendent no man could desire for his household. Faithful to "the family," and devoted to its interests far before her own, it would have been difficult to find her equal among her younger and smarter rivals. Stern good sense, a warm heart, and a shrewd understanding, characterized the old lady; though the sharpness of her tongue, at times (which pursued a lazy housemaid as relentlessly as a shadow), and its pompous garrulity at others, rather overshadowed these qualities. It only remains to be said that she was five feet nine in her "stocking feet," as she termed it; and that by reason, as she affirmed, of certain gymnastic exercises which she had performed with the bed-post every morning for the last thirty years, she had retained the uprightness of her portly figure to a remarkable degree. She was always dressed in black silk, and wore a large and very high cap, of which the fashionable ladies'

maids made great game. This head-gear being of the clearest material, enabled the eye to penetrate to a brown silk scull-cap beneath the dome. The façade presented was a row of Vandyke-brown curls of symmetrical uniformity, bound by a strap of black velvet, which fulfilled the first of architectural requirements by imparting an agreeable air of security to the edifice. Beneath these shone a pair of keen black eyes, and cheeks like winter apples.

"Well, Mr. Roundel," said the housekeeper urbanely, as she leant back in her chair, "maybe you'll like a glass of somethin', after your day's work, better than a cup o' tea. Two full services is a tax on any man, Mr. Roundel, I don't care who he is. Hand down the bottle from the top shelf of yon cupboard, Jemima. Amens alone must take a deal out of a man—having to look so sharp after 'em, too. I say it to your credit, Mr. Roundel; I never heard you let one slip this thirteen year past."

"I'm obleeged to you, Mrs. Pendarves," returned the little clerk, with a modest inclination of his

head; "but I won't take undoo credit to myself. I won't say that it don't come as nat'ral as the stage does to an old post-horse, after a time. He goes on, and he stops, a'most in his sleep. Both is a kind o' clockwork, you see, ma'am. Wind me up, and I chimes in as a matter o' course. Thank *you*, Miss Jemima. Ah! there's no one's brandy cherries like yours, Mrs. Pendarves. As I often say, all the fruit in the garden of Eden wasn't of no account beside Mrs. Pendarves' brandy cherries. He! he!"

"Well, Mr. Roundel," laughed the old lady, graciously, "it ain't forbidden fruit here, at all events. Only, don't take too many, for they're strong. Mr. Gearge, when he was a boy, came down here one day with some of his friends, and got hold of a bottle, and made themselves dreadful ill—that they did. That young Barnet (him as is the parson now) were one. He has always bin fine and thick with Master Gearge; but as for a *parson*, I shouldn't take much account on him, though I won't say as his *sarmons* mightn't stir one up more than Mr. Bloomley's does. They

say, 'set a thief to catch a thief.' Mr. Bloomley is a young man as doesn't know human natur'. I won't say nothing again' him, only his talk's a deal too soft and flowery for *me*."

"We must give him a trial," said the clerk, benignly. "He's but young at it yet, and soft. I *thought* of giving him a hint to stir us up a bit. He ha'n't said nothing about flames and torments as yet, which is part of our religion, and we demands it; but the young man has got *words* enough; when he turns the cock they flow pretty readily, don't they, Miss Jemima?"

"Oh! his language is beautiful," said the young woman, shaking her curls, "and as to his smile —its evangelical, that's what it is. When he described Paradise, and waved his white hands, I felt quite chokey."

"Don't be a fool, Jemima. You don't go to church to be choked, nor to look at the parson's white hands neither. Well, all that flowery talk don't suit *me*. Sermons are not what they used to be in my day. I never thought much of one as wasn't divided into three heads; and then one

knew where one was, and looked alive pretty sharp when he got to the 'lastly.' Now, it's all jumble, jumble, and there's neither head nor tail, and one don't know when he's got to the end till one sees every one on their knees round one, and feels quite startled like. No! give me the old-fashioned parson, who read out of a book. These new-fangled ways don't suit me. Help yourself, Mr. Roundel, another glass won't do you no harm."

"I thank you kindly, ma'am," said the clerk, helping himself without more pressing. "So Mr. George has gone into a horse regiment, they tell me? Is that true, ma'am? Sure Sir Richard won't allow him to go and get killed in foreign parts?"

"Aye," said Mrs. Pendarves sententiously, smoothing her apron as she spoke. "The young gentleman does pretty much as he likes with his uncle. Fine work he is making here now with his plays and his playing folk. I'm sure I never thought to have lived to see a couple of players living in Sir Richard's house! I put 'em in the

North Tower, because there they're out of the way, and can't do much harm (the chintz is very old, and the carpets nigh threadbare); but if I'd had my will, they'd have gone to the rooms at the farm, for, as I say, who can tell what the habits of such folk are?"

"They're all given to cussin' and swearin' terrible, ain't they?" inquired Mr. Roundel.

"Oh!" burst in Jemima, "remember, aunt, what you said yourself last night! You said, after you met Mrs. Faulconbridge, that a nicer spoken lady couldn't be, nor a sweeter face, and you wished many of Mr. George's fine friends were half as genteel."

"Handsome is as handsome does. We shall see how they conducts themselves, my dear. I've told that lazy slut, Jane, to keep a sharp look-out after the towels, and if I find this Mr. What's-his-name smoking and spitting about his room, I'll see if I can't turn him out. I haven't seen him yet, but they say——"

"Oh! he's so handsome, aunt — dark and mysterious—quite the bandit in appearance."

"That's a robber, ain't it? Humph! well, the servants *do* say—only I never listen to them—that this Mr. What's-his-name is very uppish in his manner, and that he was nigh knocking down James (I wouldn't have much cared if he *had*, for he's an idle, impudent fellow,) at the station, because he refused to put all his luggage into Sir Richard's carriage. If so be as it's true, Jemima," added her aunt, with great dignity, "such is not the manners of gentlefolk."

"I don't know about that," responded her niece, with great alacrity, "but I remember your telling me that you saw Sir Richard himself, when he was a young man, knock down a hackney-coachman who was impertinent. One's as good manners as the other, aunt, if you come to that."

"Sir Richard was awful violent in his temper as a young man, wasn't he, Mrs. Pendarves?" asked her visitor, dropping his voice. "You could tell a deal of things of his early goings on, if you *chose*, ma'am. All the world knows that."

"Mr. Roundel, I've not been a servant for fifty-

one years without learnin' my dooty. If I didn't know it now, I shouldn't be fit to rule over this house, which I've done for upward of forty year. The first dooty of servants, as they can't shut up their eyes and their ears, is to shut up their mouths, and clap a padlock on 'em too. There's things as I've seen, and things as I've heard. I don't deny it, but no one can say that they ever got anythink out of me that concerned the family honour. Lady Marg'ret, that's Sir Richard's mother, when I was but a gurl, placed every confidence in me, and I'm proud to think, Mr. Roundel, as I never betrayed it. 'Pendarves,' says she, (for I was her body-servant then, and always went up to Lunnon with her,) 'Pendarves,' says she, 'I never want to hear no servants' gossip about other gentlefolk, and I hope you'll act accordingly by me, and whatever you see and hear in my family, never repeat it,' and I never did."

"Her ladyship was a beautiful woman, to judge by her picture yonder," remarked Mr. Roundel, pointing to a mezzo-tint, from a portrait by Romney's, which hung over the housekeeper's

chimney-shelf, (for this, at all events, was a subject, as the clerk well knew, upon which Mrs. Pendarves was ever ready to dilate;) Sir Richard favoured his father more, I suppose? for her ladyship must have been dark and small."

"A pocket Venus, Mr. Roundel. When she was dressed for court, with all the family jewels, there was no one like her, even at forty, which was her age, when I first remember her. And then to hear her play on the harp! Though I'd never much of an ear for toones, I could sit and listen to her for hours. All the first musicianers of the day used to come and play with her, and there was Madame Storace and Mrs. Billington used to sing too, and ever so many others—ah! deary me!"

Some painful remembrance seemed suddenly to strike the old servant, for she stopped short, with a long-drawn sigh.

"She'd a many children, *judging* by the tablet?" observed the clerk, but with an inquiring voice. "Seven, if I rightly remember; but I suppose, Mrs. Pendarves, they mostly died as

hinfants, for I never heerd of any besides the two baronets, and Mr. George's father?"

"And Lady Trevelyan's mother, Mr. Roundel; "you're a-forgettin' her. Mr. Gearge was youngest of all. There was twenty year' difference betwixt him and his eldest brother, Sir Henry. Then come Sir Richard, three years younger; and then come three other children, who died. It took us very unexpected when Sir Henry died—only fifty; he married twice. The fust time, him and his lady didn't agree, and they separated. She died three year afore Sir Henry, and he married again that same year. We all looked forward to his havin' an heir, but he was cut off sudden, and the colonel, that's Sir Richard, come in for it all."

"Why did *he* never marry, Mrs. Pendarves?" pursued her indefatigable visitor, as he raised the last cherry to his lips; "in the prime of life, as one may say, why did *he* never marry?"

Mrs. Pendarves coughed and smoothed her apron.

"It don't become an 'ooman in my position to speckilate on the whys and wherefores, Mr. Roundel. It isn't every one as has a taste for

matrimony. I hadn't myself. Pendarves coorted me four year afore I give in. Sir Richard wasn't at a loss for an heir, ye see. There was his brother, Mr. Gearge, a poor clergyment, still quite a young man, and little Master Gearge, his son, who was born two or three year after Sir Richard inherited. There wasn't no chance of heirs runnin' dry."

"Mrs. Lacy says Sir Richard used to be very *gay* with the ladies once," observed Jemima, shaking her head mysteriously.

"Jemima! I'm surprised at you," said her aunt, severely. "Mrs. Lacy is a chatterbox, who deserves a good trouncing for all her gossip. Tittle-tattle all day long! I'll give her a bit o' my mind, if *I* catch her at it. And as to her dress, I wonder when it'll stop! Flounced and furbelourd, and frizzed, it makes me sick, Mr. Roundel, to look at the woman, that it do! I wonder Lady Trevelyan don't stop it."

"She couldn't, if she tried," said the niece, with a most provoking toss of her little curls. "No genteel lady's-maid would stop a day in a

place where the liberty of the subject was interfered with."

"What are you talking about, Jemima? There's subjects which it's a very great liberty for any servant to think of talking about. It's disrespectable to be a-discussing their masters and mistresses, and aping them in their dress; and so I've told you, over and over again. Now, you take care how you make up that check gownd I gave you; for I'll pick off every bit of trimming with my own hands, if you try that game on with *me*."

There was a mild tap at the door, and it was opened ajar at the same moment.

"May I be permitted——?"

"Come in, Mr. Millet, and take a cheer, if you will."

"I'm obliged to you, Mrs. Pendarves," said the stately official, as he rubbed his ivory hands, and advanced to the table, but without seating himself. "Until the great event of the day is over, the banquet, I have seldom a moment for relaxation. Six arrivals to-morrow, Mrs. Pen-

darves; two double-bedded, four bachelors, if *you* please. To-morrow's table, covers for twenty-four. Variety, for the épergne has cost me a good deal of anxiety to-day, but I believe I have struck out something new. I should like the Rose doo Barry Sévres instead of the old Worcester set for to-morrow, if agreeable, Mrs. Pendarves."

"You look after those careless young chaps, then, Mr. Millet, to see they don't break anything," said the housekeeper, shaking her head. "Never like giving out that Save chaney—worth, I don't know how much a plate. I'd rather, by half, you'd have the goold."

Mr. Millet did not condescend to argue the point. He made a step towards the door, then turning, he remarked in his blandest manner,—

"I should esteem it a favour, Mrs. Pendarves, if you would speak to the laundry-maid about my white vests. There is an insufficiency of starch which renders them unpleasantly limp within an hour after I have put one on. I am sorry to say," he added, still more blandly, "it is not the first time I have had to make the complaint," and

with a watery smile, he moved towards the door and disappeared.

"Humph!" muttered Mrs. Pendarves, "all the servants now, it seems, is either fools or prigs."

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE.

THE rehearsal the following morning, though far from satisfactory, was not quite so hopeless as the first two had been. There were plenty of delays, plenty of small jealousies and wranglings, and no lack of insufficiency among the actors still; but there were indications of pains having been taken to put some shape and coherence into the performance, and the whole thing was got through in half the time it had occupied on Friday and Saturday. This was easily accounted for. Edgar Faulconbridge had exerted himself, and to good purpose, among the incongruous elements assembled, and had succeeded in subjecting them to one common law. I am afraid that Sunday afternoon we have been passing in

the housekeeper's room, was spent by him chiefly in "coaching" the various actors separately in their parts; suggesting the appropriate tone and action, and bringing out the "points" in each scene which had hitherto lain dormant. From the moment that he felt himself thoroughly implicated in the business, and that he saw how greatly his wife's success or not depended on the manner in which she was supported, he was resolved the play *should* be respectably acted. By a strong effort, as it appeared, he had cast aside for the time the gloom which seemed habitual to him. All his faculties were braced up, and fastened upon the subject in hand. He seized with rapidity what it presented, and with the force of his strong will and brilliant abilities, he succeeded in imparting some of his own light to those around him. Nor was the improvement wholly superficial. The very dullest of his disciples felt he understood better what he had to do; and was better pleased with himself, and with the play.

He was "a very queer fish, proud and dictatorial, with a disagreeable sarcastic manner at

times, but *can* make himself pleasant and certainly useful—very useful." And after Monday's rehearsal Wilmot exclaimed,—

"Upon my word, I don't know what we should do without you!"

And as he awakened no jealousy at present, for he studiously avoided taking any prominent part in general society, such antagonism as had been felt towards him on his arrival had a good deal worn away. Among those who sought him out—and Louis Granfield did so especially—he now showed how entertaining he could be. He was not as much with Ferrers as might have been expected. They had one or two walks together, but the barrister fancied that his friend was no longer so willing to discuss his affairs openly with him as he had formerly been. He talked ably and fluently upon indifferent topics; seldom on personal ones. Ferrers was conscious that there was a change in their natural relations towards each other. And when he asked himself *why* this was, he could give no satisfactory reason.

The intimacy between Mrs. Faulconbridge and

Miss Skipton increased. The latter was the only woman who had really broken through the ice with the young actress. Lady Trevelyan still felt that she inspired her with invincible awe. Yet, upon the whole, there was no doubt that Mrs. Faulconbridge looked brighter, and as if, in spite of timidity and every other drawback, she found some pleasure in her visit.

The post on Monday morning brought letters which called Bradley Ferrers unexpectedly to London on urgent business. He went into Stourbridge in the break which took the rest of the party to the theatre, and went up to town by the eleven o'clock train, promising to return, if possible, the following day; or, at latest, on Wednesday.

The rehearsal that morning was over in good time. The actors walked home to luncheon, and about three o'clock the horses were brought round to the door for the riding party which George had arranged. A little bay mare of Lady Trevelyan's was to carry Mrs. Faulconbridge, being warranted "as quiet as a lamb." Lady Katherine Power, Mrs. Bailey, Etheridge, Wilmot, and George formed

the remainder of the party. Faulconbridge had been invited to join it, of course, but had declined, on the plea of having letters of business to write. He came out on the steps, however, and lifted his wife on the saddle, and gave her one or two instructions how to hold her reins. Lady Trevelyan came out too, and stood there, shading her eyes with her hand as she watched the start, while some of the men lounged round, smoking and canvassing the points of each horse—and lady.

"Ain't you afraid of putting your wife outside such an animal as that, Bailey? I see she has a good seat."

"She likes it," said the silent husband. Then, after puffing at his cigar for a minute, he added, "He'd be quiet enough if Bell didn't dig the spur into him."

The last fold of Mrs. Faulconbridge's habit was now finally settled.

"You will remember she is but a novice, and look after her, Mr. Stourton," said Faulconbridge.

"He is not likely to forget that," murmured Etheridge.

"She looks well on horseback, and sits as straight as an arrow," said Granfield.

"All stuff about the woman's never having ridden before," hissed out little Carton. "Probably taken from a circus; indeed, I believe I remember her face at the Hippodrome. She's up to the Haute Ecole in more ways than one, eh? Deuced sharp bit she has put into that young fool's mouth, though! He! he!"

They started, and the loungers strolled away, some to the racket-court, others to take a stretch over the hills and meet the rest of the ladies, who had driven to Horsley Castle.

"Is Sir Richard at home, Millet?" asked Lady Trevelyan, as she turned to enter the house.

"He rode over to Brackfield before luncheon, my lady, and said he should not be home till dinner-time."

Faulconbridge followed into the hall. He watched her going up the great oak staircase. The shimmering silk fell in graceful folds from that firm, well-balanced figure, as she moved slowly upwards, and then, turning the angle of the

corridor, was lost to sight. The cloud overshadowed his brow again as he looked at her, and, as the last sweep of her dress vanished, he abruptly entered the library. It was empty. He walked up and down for some time with folded arms, then halted before Laurence's portrait of Sir Richard. He seemed to be in no hurry to write those business letters he had talked of. After standing there for a while, he moved towards one of the four doors of the apartment, and turned the handle.

He found himself in a small room, where he had never yet been, but which communicated, as he well knew, with Sir Richard's "study," as it was styled. Into this the profaning foot of stranger never passed. It was here the baronet sat of a morning when he saw his bailiff and administered justice (God save the mark), and had interviews with Mrs. Pendarves, and looked over Mr. Millet's weekly books. It was here Sir Richard wrote his letters and read the day's paper; here, in short, where he passed most of his time. And into this room, where, without a special invitation, no one ever came, Faulconbridge now boldly entered.

It bore, at a glance, the evidence of luxury and self-indulgence, if not of refinement. A large escritoire stood near the window, the drawers of which were locked. Before it was an easy—a very easy chair, and a foot-rest. Upon the opposite side of the chimney was a wide sofa in morocco, and behind this a case filled with gorgeously-bound books. Latin authors, all of whom would have found a place in the *Index Purgatorius* of a purist in morals, occupied the lower shelves. Above these the worst and wittiest of French memoirs, with a choice collection of Wycherley's and Congreve's plays, were ranged; while over these again came more modern works of a like tendency; foremost among them, the novels of Paul de Kock. A bronze statuette of a Bacchante crowned this case, and on the wall hung some French engravings, more or less meretricious, together with a portrait of his gracious Majesty George the Fourth, in a wig and a fur collar. On the mantelpiece stood a gilt clock, representing Leda and the Swan, a work of art of the date of the Empire, Leda herself bearing a strong resemblance to the Empress

Josephine *en deshabille*; and above this hung by far the most interesting object in the room—a picture by Zoffany, representing a family group, the central figure of which it was not difficult to recognize as the original of Romney's beautiful portrait, an engraving of which hung in the housekeeper's room. She was here seen, surrounded by her husband and five children, the two eldest of whom had already reached man's estate. At the back of Lady Margaret's chair (which stood, by-the-by, under one of the beeches in the park, with a view of Stourton Towers in the distance,) was the head of a young girl. This head, however, was so unlike any other in that group, that it was difficult to believe it belonged to the same family. It was dark, and wonderfully expressive. The eyes were proud melancholy brown eyes; the little mouth looked capable of showing both passion and tenderness. Her hand, in its glove of brown Swedish leather, held a roll of music, to which she pointed, after the manner of sitters in the hands of a fashionable por trait-painter. It was a very pleasant picture, and the great beauty of the mother and her children

rendered that family group doubly attractive; but, after the first minute or so, one found one's attention riveted more and more by that dark young head in the background, and it was what remained most indelibly impressed on the memory when one had turned away.

It was to this picture that Edgar Faulconbridge at once directed his eyes on entering the room. He glanced rapidly round: but no other object offered any attraction to him, apparently. He sat down composedly on the large leather chair opposite the picture, and leaning forward, with his elbows resting on his knees, and his chin supported by both hands, he remained for some time in contemplation of that quaint group of portraits. When he moved, it was but to let his face fall between his hands; and thus, shutting out all that might disturb the current of his thoughts, he sat motionless, for nearly half an hour.

Something rustled close beside him. He lifted his head. Lady Trevelyan stood there, looking at him with considerable surprise. So abstracted

had he been as not to hear the door open. He now rose and bowed, colouring slightly, but showing no other signs of discomposure, while the lady herself looked embarrassed, and at a loss how to commence what she had to say.

"Mr. Faulconbridge—my uncle is very particular—forgive me—about people entering his room. Any other sitting-room in the house is at your disposal but this."

"I knew he was out, or I shouldn't have come in, Lady Trevelyan. I wanted to see this picture."

"How did you know of its existence?" she asked, with surprise.

"You yourself mentioned it the other night."

She paused a moment: then said, smiling, "You appeared to me to be asleep just now, in my uncle's chair, rather than examining a picture."

"I *had* been examining it," he said; then added, suddenly, "Tell me, Lady Trevelyan, if you can, something of that family group? Your grandmother, was she not—Lady Margaret Stour-

ton? And those are all her children, I suppose, except the dark girl in the background. She looks as if she had belonged to a different race. Do you know anything about her?"

"She was a foreigner—an Italian protégée of my grandmother's, I believe, who lived here for some years, and afterwards died, I have heard; but, indeed, I know very little about her. She must have been very handsome, judging by that head; but the expression of the face is wonderfully melancholy."

"Yet at that time of her life, at least, she ought to have had no cause for such, one would think."

"To eat the bread of dependence must always be more or less bitter," returned Lady Trevelyan.

Faulconbridge's brow was knit, and his lip quivered, as he said,—

"Ay! And the men of the race of Stourton were not likely to allow her to forget that fact, I should think. The cold blue eyes and heavy, Austrian lips of those children——"

"Mr. Faulconbridge!" Lady Trevelyan looked

at him with astonishment, then fairly laughed. "Surely you know that one of those children was my mother? A gentler and kinder creature never breathed. Another, my uncle George, was the best man I ever knew. Those two faces belie them, if you read there any ungentle qualities."

"I spoke of the *men;* though I see throughout the family a certain pride, which may have been softened or counteracted in after life. But in the instance of Sir Richard, at least, there are indications of character which have been amply fulfilled, I should think."

Lady Trevelyan stood silent for a moment or two, her eyes bent downwards upon a book, the leaves of which her fingers turned half-unconsciously, as it lay open upon the table before her.

"Mr. Faulconbridge, you are a very young man," she said, at last, looking up at him with full, steadfast eyes: "I will take the privilege of a middle-aged woman to give you a few words of advice. You appear to me to be setting forth with your hand against every man's, believing every man's hand to be against yours. This is a

great mistake in any one. In your position it is doubly so."

"'What do you mean by 'my position?'" he said, quickly.

"That of a man who has his own way to make in the world—his own exertions solely to depend on. You seem resolved to believe in an antagonism to you which does not exist. I cannot account otherwise for your manner and the general tenor of your observations—particularly with regard to Sir Richard Stourton. The worst phase of Radicalism is bitterness in the matter of social distinctions—rank and wealth. You are poor—fortunately for yourself, though you do not think so now; but your abilities would never be brought out fully, except by the stern hand of necessity. My uncle is old, and he is rich. What is there in this that should rouse your animosity? I grant that his manners may not always be ingratiating; but you must remember his age. I assure you that both you and your wife have produced a remarkable impression on him. He has more than once questioned me

about you—an unusual thing with him. If for no higher motive than self-interest, Mr. Faulconbridge, do not let your morbid sensitiveness, or whatever it may be, stand in the way of your success."

A change came over Faulconbridge's face as she spoke: the fierce, sarcastic smile died away; an expression of sternness settled down on it. He waited for a moment after she had finished speaking, as if to see whether she would add anything. But the lady had said all she meant; in a manner, too, which made it impossible to take offence—so kind and gentle, nay almost maternal, was it. He replied slowly, while he leant forward towards her, laying both hands on the table:—

"I will tell you why I speak thus. Because I have endured almost the greatest wrong one man can suffer at the hands of another, from some one situated in a very similar position to Sir Richard Stourton. All my prospects in life have been blasted; the lives and happiness of those I loved best have been sacrificed to the

brutal, selfish cunning of one man. That is why I am an Ishmael in society, Lady Trevelyan. He who has been cheated out of wealth doesn't appreciate the blessings of poverty as keenly as he ought, perhaps. It may even tend to make him cynical—an unpardonable offence in the world's eyes—and as to his *success*——"

He broke off abruptly, with a bitter smile. The next moment, however, he went on, as if ashamed of having indulged in this petty exhibition of feeling:

"Lady Trevelyan, you are the first person who has ever tempted me into speaking thus much of myself. I have been betrayed by your indulgence with me into saying far more than I ever dreamt of doing, and I must beg you to consider the few words I have dropped as sacred between us. Even to my friend Ferrers I have never so much as hinted at causes which have led to my present position. We only speak of *effects*—of the present and the future. What's the use of talking of the past with a practical man—a lawyer, too? A woman is more lenient to the

folly which clings round matters of sentiment; I suppose it is this that has surprised me into—into saying what I have. I am young still, you see. Ten years hence I shall have hardened against all such influences."

With a half-sigh, half-smile he said this. Lady Trevelyan replied, quickly,—

"Not unless you encourage the hardening process, Mr. Faulconbridge. Believe me, it is in your own hands, not in the power of others, or of any evil fate, as some call it, to determine what your character shall be. I can well understand how, at the outset of life,—and you are at its very outset, I believe,—the circumstances to which you allude should gall and irritate you, and how difficult it must be all at once to attain a God-like calm and indifference in the face of all the good things of this world, of which you feel you have been unjustly deprived. But there is something worth still more—a belief in human sympathy; kindliness and charity in your judgment of others: let nothing deprive you of that, Mr. Faulconbridge. You may build up your

own fortune in time, which is better than any inheritance; but *these* are possessions which it is impossible to recover when once lost."

"They are not entirely lost in me as yet, though I have an ugly cynical manner, you see, and am sceptical at times about the excellence of my fellow-creatures. I'm not what it's the fashion to call 'an optimist,' for circumstances have brought me in contact with the worst aspects of human nature. But, thank God!" he added, and his face lit up as he spoke with an expression very rare to it, "I have known the best and most beautiful side of human nature—the side of patient suffering, of sacrifice and endurance, of constancy and devotion. My belief in these will never die."

"If you are thinking of your wife, Mr. Faulconbridge, is not that more than compensation for all the rest?"

The young man turned his face suddenly towards the window.

"You do not know,"—he began, then stopped short. Lady Trevelyan thought that she saw him

brush the back of his hand across his eyes. When he spoke again, his words had apparently little connection with what had just passed.

"Lady Trevelyan, a strong impulse led me into this room; and I don't regret it. It was an enormity, wasn't it, to force an entry into your uncle's secret closet?—(there *might be* a skeleton in it—who can tell?) But I haven't all the abstract principles about right and wrong that you have. Before our acquaintance comes to an end, you will find that out. In my own way, I set about trying to make the wrong right; but the world probably won't approve of my way. Never mind; if you should side with the world, I shall not forget this morning, and still remember that you once took the friendly trouble to remonstrate with a man who is dead, as you see, to all the laws that govern polite society."

He held the door open for her as he spoke, and they both passed out, she upstairs, without the book she had come down to look for, he out into the park, under the lengthening shadows of the oaks.

"He is certainly a very strange young man—very unlike any one I have ever met," said Lady Trevelyan to herself, as she sat down before her window, and watched his figure striding out into the deer-park, now lost between the trees, now visible again, till a sudden dip in the ground effectually concealed him. "What is there that interests me about him? Why do I feel more attracted than repelled by a manner almost uncouth at times, and a nature which he takes little pains to conceal is half savage? An ill-conditioned boy, playing at cynicism; I suppose that is what a strong-minded woman of my age" (Lady Trevelyan smiled to herself as she thought this) "ought to call him. I can't help it—the boy interests me. I believe that if he were in wise and gentle hands—ah! I was forgetting he was married, and to a woman for whom I am glad to see he has even a higher, more enduring feeling than the mere boy's passion—to judge by what he let fall to-day. Otherwise I should have been afraid—well, well, it shows how apt one is

to form a rapid and false judgment. I must try and talk more with her. I wish she were not so afraid of me. She is certainly very pretty, and has a sweet voice."

CHAPTER XI.

CROSSING THE FORD.

THE riding party rode nearly abreast as long as they were on the smooth turf. On turning out of the park gates, they dropped gradually into twos, of which George and Mrs. Faulconbridge formed the last, Etheridge and Lady Katherine the second, while Wilmot and Mrs. Bailey led the way. This lady looked to remarkable advantage, as she well knew, on horseback, being a capital rider, with a most adorable little figure, slight, pliant, and well balanced. The horse she rode, a big, powerful hunter of her husband's, was a fidgety animal on the road; but she had not the shadow of a fear, and the horse knew it, for

there seemed to be a compact between them that he should only play his tricks on demand. After a while, when he had shown off his rider's excellent management by bounding from one side of the road to the other, and making at imaginary fences in the middle, he went quietly enough. It was arranged they should take Hursley Castle in the course of their ride, and so perhaps meet the carriage and walking parties.

"Shall we go over the Hawley Down, and round by the Lower Ford?" she cried, laying her hand upon the back of her saddle, and turning round to George, an evolution which, thus executed, was remarkably graceful.

The Baileys, it may be said, *en passant*, lived only eighteen miles from Stourton, so that the country was well known to them.

"Your horse don't take kindly to the water, Mrs. Bailey, and the river may be swollen after the late rains. I think we'd better take the straight cut home by the Hawley farms, or by the road."

"Nonsense! I like making old Highflyer do

what he *don't* like. If Mrs. Faulconbridge isn't afraid—you needn't trouble your head about *me*."

"I'm not at all afraid," said Mrs. Faulconbridge, quickly. "Pray don't spoil your ride on my account."

"That little mare is so quiet and steady I shouldn't mind, Mrs. Faulconbridge, but that I believe the ford is really more swollen than Mrs. Bailey is aware of. You are in my charge, you know," he added, smiling, "and I'm responsible for your safety, which I don't feel myself for the other ladies. We can come round by the ford, however, and if it is in its natural condition, we can cross; if not, we shall only have lost a couple of miles, and return by the bridge."

They cantered on; and to Nina Faulconbridge what an enchantment that first ride was! She felt a pride and satisfaction which she did not attempt to analyse; the whole sensation was so novel, and so exhilarating. The movement of the horse under her, the excitement of passing rapidly through the air, the surprise at finding

how perfectly at home she felt already in her exalted position, and (last, though not least stimulant) the gratification of "showing off" to such advantage before a very pleasant companion, combined to make that ride a very intoxicating one to the young foreign-bred woman. How intensely green the burgioned tips of the hedges looked as they flew by! How good the resinous scent of the fir-trees as they rode under them! How strangely sweet the half-human voice of the cuckoo, heard for the first time that year, as they passed the hazel coppice on the hills!

After that, they came to the short, smooth turf of the great down, that, like some monster lying at full length, flung its hard brown back across the country, stretching a limb here and there among villages and fields. Masses of great white cloud moved swiftly across the sky before the keen March wind, and their shadows beneath scudded over the downs, the villages, and fields, in broken phalanx, like the stragglers of a routed army. The riding party here once more came abreast as they galloped over the hill, and Nina Faulcon-

bridge, finding herself alongside Lady Katherine, could not resist some exclamation of delight out of the exuberance of her enjoyment. At another moment, it is not unlikely that the latter lady might have returned such an answer as would have frozen up the springs of the most enthusiastic garrulity. But now a gracious smile, and a few trivial words spoken with unusual energy and liveliness, indicated that something very remarkable must have happened. Nina was too happy to trouble her head about it; or if it crossed her mind at all, she probably attributed the change to the beneficial influences under which she was then enjoying herself. But George, as a young gentleman who had already seen something of life, cast a scrutinizing glance into Lady Katherine's flushed face and sparkling eyes, and across her at Etheridge. And then he felt that he knew all about it.

He was sorry for his friend—very; but with this there mingled a sense of relief to think that he was free from Sir Richard's importunities, and Lady Bideford's open assaults, henceforward.

At the foot of the down lay the little village of Hawley, and here the river was crossed by an old wooden bridge, where our riding party joined the carriage road which led to Hursley Castle. But the ride had taken them a round of some miles, and Hursley, which was only four from Stourton by the road, and still nearer by the foot-path, was already deserted when they reached it. The "quality," so the old woman at the gate told them, had left it more than half an hour.

They did not dismount, for there was nothing to see "in four old walls," Mrs. Bailey remarked, and it was a mere loss of time. The romantic Skipton had no doubt thought differently, for the old woman in charge produced a roll of crumpled papers, which one of "the quality," she said, had dropped in the tower; and on inspection this turned out to be the whole of Madame Deschappelles' part, transcribed in the familiar characters of the gushing spinster.

It was already late in the afternoon when they approached the ford, some two or three miles below Hawley Bridge. Etheridge and Lady

Katherine had dropped behind, and were out of sight. The four who rode in front were close together. George rose in his stirrups as they neared the river, and brought his hand down smartly upon his horse's shoulder, with an exclamation of impatience.

"It's impossible, Mrs. Bailey, the stream is even more swollen than I expected. It's up to this little mare's girths. We must turn back."

"Fiddle-de-dee, Mr. Stourton! Haven't I crossed it a dozen times when the water was quite as high as it is now? Come along, Mr. Wilmot; if you'll only give Highflyer a lead, he'll go well enough."

"By all means; certainly, if you desire it, Mrs. Bailey," said Wilmot, laughing; and he drove his spurs into his horse, hitting him a smart cut at the same time. The horse, however, more sagacious animal of the two, expressed his opinion on the subject by setting his fore-feet firmly into the bank, and lashing out with his hind ones, a manœuvre which nearly succeeded in dislodging Wilmot, and landing him in the river.

It was in vain he flogged and spurred—the brute only put back his ears, and lashed out more wildly than before.

"Come, Wilmot, you'd better give it up," cried George. "Mrs. Bailey, it's getting late. Let us go round by the bridge, without losing any more time."

"Oh! what a shocking want of pluck, Mr. Stourton. I should be ashamed to be turned back from my purpose by a trumpery little stream like that."

"It is *not*, and never was my purpose, Mrs. Bailey," he replied, with perfect good-humour. "If you've a fancy for it, you know, you can come here every day with Bailey, and cross backwards and forwards, as often as you please: but I shan't try and get Mrs. Faulconbridge across."

"It is a very short cut home," pursued the obstinate little lady. "Remember it saves at least three miles."

"And we have wasted more than five minutes here."

"Where's Colonel Etheridge? I'm sure *he*'ll

come over with me. Mr. Wilmot, I don't believe you're trying to make your horse take to the water."

"Come, that's hard, Mrs. Bailey. I've done my best. Perhaps my horse will go in after yours: It is humiliating to have to ask you to show me the way; but I see he won't go in without a lead."

It was an evil hour when that little lady was told that she sat her horse well, and need be afraid of nothing. With the foolhardiness of ignorance, she now turned her horse's head, and then pressed him forward sharply with whip and spur towards the bank again. At its very edge he reared, lost his footing, and toppled over into the river. The poor little woman gave a sharp scream as she felt herself flung out of the saddle, and the powerful brute rolled upon her. The mud was very thick just there, and the animal, in his terror, kicked and plunged so violently, that for two or three minutes Mrs. Bailey was in some danger of being choked.

George was already off his saddle.

"Don't *you* move, Wilmot. I know the stream. Look after Mrs. Faulconbridge;" and he leapt in, up above his waist, seizing Highflyer's rein, as he did so. The horse had struggled twice to rise, and had got his fore-feet into a deep hole each time. He made now a third effort, as George seized his head; and, in doing so, his near hoof struck the latter so violently on the side that George was nearly knocked down himself. He only staggered back for a moment, however; the next, he was extricating Mrs. Bailey from the mass of tangled weeds, and mud, and stones which impeded her rising. She had not lost her consciousness. The instant the weight of the horse was off her, she tried to get up; and as her head had fallen near the bank, the depth of water was not sufficient to render this difficult. With George's help, she struggled to her feet; but what a spectacle did the smart little lady present! Her face cut and bruised with the stones, her hat smashed in, her habit dripping with black mud, and its skirt nearly torn off, where it had caught in the pommel, and fortunately given way—in

this lamentable plight she was scarcely to be recognized as the coquettish amazon who had ridden forth in all her pride a couple of hours before.

They made a sorry group, indeed, as they stood there on the bank; Highflyer himself, poor animal, trembling in every limb, with one or two cuts about the legs, for which Bailey will not bless his wife, if he ever takes his hunter up to Tattersall's; George, dripping at every limb, and now, for the first time, conscious that he was suffering from an odd sharp pain in his side, and that his right hand had received a severe sprain; Mrs. Bailey, futilely attempting, with the smallest and thinnest of handkerchiefs, to staunch the blood and wipe the mud from her hair and face.

Mrs. Faulconbridge had jumped from her horse, and was steeping her own handkerchief in the water.

"Mrs. Bailey, use this, or let me do it for you. . . . I am so sorry. I hope you are not much hurt!"

"My habit is horribly torn. Is my face much

cut? Give me a pin, if you have one. What a figure I am, to be sure!"

"I never saw such an escape!" said Wilmot. He was on his knees ringing her habit, with his bridle thrown over his arm. "Are you sure you're not hurt?"

"No—at least, I don't think so; but don't look at me, Mr. Wilmot. I'm sure I'm a fright. How shall I ever be able to get home as I am?"

Nina Faulconbridge turned aside, thinking her pity and attention better bestowed elsewhere.

"I am afraid you've hurt your arm, Mr. Stourton. I'm sure you are in pain. Let me bind it up for you. If it is sprained, you had better not try and use it."

He let her take the hand, and do what she liked. He *was* in pain; he felt really sick as he leant there against his saddle. She bound the wet handkerchief which Mrs. Bailey had rejected tightly round his wrist; and then, pulling off her own narrow black cravat, she knotted it into a sling and bade him slip it over his head. He

answered by a smile, and raised his left hand to his side.

"It is nothing. I have a pain here, but it is of no consequence. . . . Never mind me, Mrs. Faulconbridge. Will Mrs. Bailey be able to mount again? or shall I ride back and tell them to send her a carriage?"

"You want one much more yourself, I think," said Nina, in a low voice. "She has nothing the matter. You look quite pale, Mr. Stourton. I am sure you are in great pain."

Mrs. Bailey had settled the question as regarded herself, in the meantime, by letting Wilmot lift her into the saddle.

"Come, Mr. Stourton," she cried, "jump up. I'm all right again; only I'm ashamed to be seen. Fortunately, it will be quite dark before we get home."

"Let me lean on your shoulder, Wilmot," said George, and he bit his lip hard, as he swung himself up into the saddle.

Nina Faulconbridge, with a troubled face, rode beside him in silence all the way home. She

looked up furtively at him from time to time. He was very pale, but he said nothing.

They had ridden a full half-mile before they came upon the two stragglers from the party, riding leisurely towards them, their reins lying upon their horses' necks.

Three-quarters of an hour later, they entered the park gates. It was quite dark. When George, with a groom's help, got off his horse, he did what heroes never do—he fainted.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PLAY IS POSTPONED.

Mrs. Bailey ran into the house, and through the hall, and upstairs, in dread of being seen, and with an utter disregard to the condition of her preserver. To do her justice, however, it must be acknowledged that George had exerted himself to hide how much he suffered during those four or five miles. It was clear, now, however, that the pain must have been very sharp, which could master a strong physical organisation such as his.

Mrs. Faulconbridge had lingered on the steps, in spite of Mr. Millet's pointed address to her, to the effect that the first dinner-bell had rung some time. There she stood, waiting to see George dismount. She heard him call the groom; he leant heavily on the man's shoulder; and then, had it

not been for Wilmot's running up, he would have rolled over upon the ground. The two men together carried him into the hall, and through it into George's own room, which was on the ground-floor.

There was great hubbub and consternation. Sir Richard came out in dressing-gown and slippers, and crossed the hall into his nephew's room. Ditto Lady Trevelyan from upstairs, in a white muslin wrapper, with a gold-stoppered bottle of eau-de-Cologne in her hand. Mrs. Pendarves, with burnt feathers and vinegar, and her aide-de-camp, Jemima, useless enough, with the bag of keys and a pocket-handkerchief in her hand, standing outside the door. Millet imperturbable, as a great general in battle, transmits the orders of the commander-in-chief. The doctor to be fetched from Stourbridge, as fast as the dog-cart can bring him. Dinner to be put off for an hour.

The news spreads like wild-fire through the servants' hall. The ladies'-maids carry up appallingly exaggerated versions of the truth to their mistresses. It must be a serious matter, since

the dinner is put off. The French cook is in despair about his *rôtis*. Had an accident befallen any other young gentleman in the house—say the actor, Mr. Faulconbridge, for instance—why, things would not be disturbed out of their usual course; but an accident to the heir of all the Stourtons!

Quite unnoticed in the general confusion, the figure of a lady in a riding-dress glides down the long corridor, and up the stone staircase of the North Tower. At the door of the sitting-room, Edgar is standing waiting for her.

"You are very late, Nina. I have been anxious about you. You look pale, my child."

"Do I, Edgar? I have been rather frightened. That silly woman, Mrs. Bailey, chose to try and ford a river where Mr. Stourton begged her not to go; and I believe she would have been drowned if it hadn't been for him."

"No great loss either, I should think. Was that all?"

"Why, no; for Mr. Stourton was, I am afraid, badly hurt. He was evidently in great pain all

the way home, and when he was lifted off his horse he fainted. They have sent for the doctor, and Sir Richard is in a great state, as you may imagine."

"Of course," replied her husband, with an ironical smile. "A mere scratch of the finger to the heir of the Stourtons is a matter of importance. I suppose all the maids are round him with diachylon, ain't they?"

"He is *really* hurt, Edgar," replied the wife, gently, "though there is nothing to be seen, I fancy; at least his hand, which seems quite useless, is not cut in any way."

Edgar's countenance changed.

"This may be a serious nuisance, Nina. If he is really much hurt it may put a stop to everything, and interfere with—with——"

"With what, Edgar?"

"Why, with these plays, to begin with. We may be sent about our business to-morrow. That would be a bore, wouldn't it?"

He looked at her with keen scrutiny.

"In many ways, perhaps, it would be better"—

a slight colour mounted to her cheek as she spoke. "You know how averse I was to the idea of our coming here at first, dear Edgar; though I did not attempt to *argue* the question with you. Our position here is a false one; and I am sure you have suffered much in many ways since we arrived. I don't deny that I have met with more kindness, and have been much happier than I expected, but —but—I can't help feeling very often as if——"

She stopped short.

"My dear Nina," said her husband, gravely, "you have intrusted your future blindly to me, have you not? For my part, I have been anxious not to cloud your young life by the knowledge of any dark secrets, if I could help it, or by a participation in any of my schemes for the future, which could only trouble your present enjoyment, and might possibly defeat my ends. Let it be sufficient, therefore, that, so far, our way here has been smooth. If by this untoward accident we are compelled to leave this, why, the chief disappointment is, of course, mine," (here he looked again searchingly into her face,) "and no great

harm is done. If, on the other hand, we remain, a very few days will decide how my schemes can best be carried out."

"Why scheme at all, dear?" said Nina, as she put her arms round his neck.

"Because I was born a Macchiavelli, *Nina mia*," he replied, laughing, "and fate has kindly thrust me into very crooked and difficult ways. My talents would all have been wasted had I been the heir to a great fortune, like this young Stourton, for instance. We have our way to make, Nina, you and I; our way to fight for, tooth and nail. The world's weapons are numerous; the sharpest that have wounded *me* have been fraud and treachery, and I use a very mild one in return — *deception*. I have well balanced every possible consequence of the step I have taken; and I have also come to the conclusion that every man is justified in using such deception where no betrayal is involved. I choose to conceal our name and condition, to further certain ends of my own. That is no one's business but mine. I say this to you, Nina, because,

knowing nothing of the past, it is impossible you should understand the motives of my conduct now, or its possible bearing upon our future. But you have yielded blind and implicit obedience to me. I want you to understand that I have not taken to this mode of life, and changed our name, and all the rest of it, without mature deliberation. Will you continue to trust me, Nina?"

She said nothing, but leant her head upon his shoulder. He stooped and kissed it; and a few minutes later he walked away to his dressing-room. She took off her riding-habit, and sat down to brush out her hair. But somehow or other the fingers slowly slid downwards; the eyes rested dreamily on the glass before her; the process of dressing came to a stand-still altogether.

Her thoughts it is not given to us to read; but after a few minutes she woke up from that day-dream with a start, and continued her toilette with trembling hands, and the rapidity of an almost feverish excitement. Then she slipped downstairs into the vast, dim library, lit by its

solitary lamp on the distant table, and she sat in one of the far corners of the room, with shadow all round her, waiting anxiously.

The doctor meantime was come, and Sir Richard's mind was set at ease. George's injuries, though painful, were not serious. He had broken two ribs, and his wrist was badly sprained, but these a little attention and prudence would soon set right.

"Ay!" quoth the baronet, who, now that his just anxiety was removed, reverted to one of very secondary importance—"Ay, sir, but all this is a question of time, and there are these confounded plays to come off the day after to-morrow. It is impossible he can act in that condition—eh?"

"It would be very imprudent, Sir Richard," said the man of medicine, shaking his head. "He should move about very little, for fear of disturbing the bandages; though I dare say it will be difficult enough to keep him quiet. Still, a few days——"

"Oh, I'll put off the affair altogether."

Here Lady Trevelyan interposed.

"Say for a week, my dear uncle. It will disappoint George so very much, now that everything is settled, if his arrangements are all knocked on the head. To-day is Monday. Let us say Wednesday week, instead of Wednesday next, if Dr. Gill thinks it probable that George may be well enough to move about with ease before that time."

"Oh, dear, yes, my lady. I have no doubt of it whatever, if he is only commonly careful. As to the wrist, he will probably be obliged to carry that in a sling for some time to come; but that won't interfere with his acting."

"May I send at once, then, to the *Stourbridge Herald*, uncle Richard, and desire advertisements to be posted, and also sent round the neighbourhood, to this effect?"

Like a true woman of energy and resource, she never waited for her iron to get cool before she struck it. Uncle Richard gave a reluctant assent; and so the council, held *en robe de chambre* in the room adjoining George's, came

to a satisfactory termination, and Lady Trevelyan hurried away to write her instructions for the Stourbridge printers.

Of course it was a great bore—there could be no doubt of that. Many of the arrangements made for this week would not hold good for the next. Several of the guests had engagements which would prevent their remaining at Stourton Towers beyond Saturday. Mrs. Bailey, having only brought fourteen gowns, one for each morning and evening of her seven days, must inevitably depart on Thursday. Wilmot, having only leave "between returns," must be with his regiment on Monday; and it was possible he might not be allowed to come back and assume his important part of Glavis.

Then there were those actor-people. Ten whole days more of them was "an oppressively large order," as Etheridge remarked. And in a lower region Mrs. Pendarves observed, in an aggrieved tone, that she hadn't meant to have changed their sheets, which now she should be obliged to do, for dirt was a thing as she never had abode, and

never would abide, let the parties be who they might. She hoped they had brought no fleas, which it might naturally be expected they would; but she derived consolation from the reflection that they used cold water freely; and the lady, it must be owned, was a very sweet-faced young woman, and well spoken.

Lady Trevelyan, in her thoughtfulness, wrote to Bradley Ferrers that evening, and gave instructions that her letter should be sent to Stourbridge in time for the early mail the following morning, so that he might receive it in London by the second delivery. What she wrote was as follows:—

"Lest you should hurry away from your business in London, in order to keep your promise of being with us on Wednesday, I write to tell you that the theatricals are postponed for a week. As you may imagine, nothing but necessity would have altered all our arrangements at the eleventh hour. George has met with an accident—not serious, but sufficient to incapacitate him for a few days from much active exertion. The Faul-

conbridges can fortunately stay—she of course being by far the most important person of the *troupe* to secure. If Mr. Wilmot and Colonel Etheridge are obliged to leave us, we must try and replace them as well as we can.

"I write in great haste, and am

"Yours, &c.,

"DIANA TREVELYAN.

"P.S.—Lady Bideford has just confided to me in great triumph that Colonel Etheridge has proposed and been accepted by Lady Katherine. I tried to congratulate, but broke down, finding it difficult to say anything about either of them, except that I had no doubt they were suited to each other, and that I hoped the marriage would realize Lady Bideford's expectations. I couldn't help thinking how few *do* realize the hopes formed about them. Is your friend Mr. Faulconbridge quite happy, I wonder, in *his* married life? He is very odd—very difficult to understand. But more of this when I see you."

CHAPTER XIII.

PERSIFLAGE.

The following day George was induced, with considerable difficulty, to lie in state on a sofa in the library, where his friends, male and female, came and talked to him. He was in capital spirits, and declared he felt no pain; but, though this might be true when he was in a quiescent state, it was evident the least movement was attended with some suffering. Sofa-ridden, therefore, he must remain for two or three days at least.

The position of nearly every one of that party had undergone a change in consequence of the events of the preceding day. Etheridge's proposal and Lady Katherine's acceptance had, of course, oozed out: such little events always do in a country house, even without a garrulous mamma

to commit the secret "in strict confidence" to the keeping of half a dozen ladies in succession. Lady Bideford and her eldest daughter were radiant: not, as the former observed, that it was quite the marriage *she* should have chosen for her darling child, but she had resolved never to interfere with her affections, and they were irrevocably fixed on Colonel Etheridge. The English of which was, as Mrs. Bailey remarked, that the colonel would certainly have four or five thousand a year at his old father's death, and that Lady Katherine was nearly five-and-twenty. The event only seemed to affect her sister by making her slink yet further into the shade, where good-natured Louis Granfield went in search of her occasionally, to remark that it was very warm for the time of year, or some little amenity of that kind.

George received a levée that morning in his own room. But about twelve o'clock he insisted upon being led into the library, where he consented to lie upon a sofa for the next two or three days. He was alone. Cousin Di had left him to go and look after the ladies; the men were gone to smoke their

cigars in the stables, or to the billiard-room, for it was raining.

The door opened, and Mrs. Faulconbridge came in. She looked round the room. She had not expected to see George, and at first did not see him in the embrasure of the window where his sofa was drawn.

"Good morning, Mrs. Faulconbridge."

She started and coloured.

"I did not know you were here, Mr. Stourton. I am glad to see you are able to leave your room. I hope you are not suffering very much?"

"Oh, not at all, now. The bother of it is, our play being put off; for they insist on my being kept quiet for a few days."

"I—your friends, I mean, must be thankful it is no worse. You mustn't trouble your head about the play now, Mr. Stourton; you ought to remain quiet. I thought Mr. Faulconbridge was here, or I should not have come in. Can you tell me where he is?"

She was moving towards the door.

"Stay, Mrs. Faulconbridge! You're not going

to run away, are you? I made them bring me in here on purpose to try and get an hour or two's quiet rehearsal with you. That third act doesn't go at all yet; we require rehearsing that a great deal. I told Faulconbridge."

She stood there, hesitating, her face turned a little away from him. How could she refuse? Was she not hired for this purpose? What excuse could she give?

"Did he think so, too?" she said at last.

"Of course," he replied, laughing. "There can't be two opinions on that subject. If it were a fine day, Mrs. Faulconbridge, I would not be so cruel as to ask you to victimize yourself; but being wet, I hope you'll be charitable, and have pity on me."

"Oh, Mr. Stourton, it isn't *that*," she exclaimed, turning towards him, and putting her little hands together, with a pretty deprecatory movement. "Of course I am bound to do whatever you wish in this way; I know that, only——"

"I should be sorry you thought yourself *bound* to do anything very distasteful to you," he said,

with a touch of resentment in his tone. "Pray consider yourself perfectly *free* to rehearse as little as you think fit, Mrs. Faulconbridge. It was as a personal favour to myself I asked it."

Poor little thing! The tears stood in her eyes. How little do we know very often of the secret trials and difficulties of others! We pass hasty judgments on their actions in entire ignorance of all that is passing underneath.

"Let us begin," she said.

And she took the book from the table, and sat down opposite to him.

In the drawing-room adjoining there was a very different party. Old Lady Granfield, with her knitting; Miss Skipton engaged in studying a volume of costumes; Mrs. Bailey, not taking the trouble to speak to either of the above ladies, but sitting buried in a *causeuse*, pretending to embroider. She was in a very bad and spiteful humour with almost everything that morning. Her face was scratched and swollen. Two or three men had dropped from the circle she spent her time in trying to captivate. If she stayed she had no new

gown to wear after Wednesday night. Her frame of mind was not altogether benevolent towards any of her sex. The sight of Lady Katherine's happiness acted on her tongue as soda acts on acid—it made it effervesce.

Carton was the individual towards whom apparently she felt herself most drawn that morning by the sympathy of evil-speaking, and by the craving of a diseased appetite for admiration, no matter how coarse and fulsome; and as she leant back, her mauve silk dress separated from her white throat by a soft plait of Valenciennes, and allowing the undulation of her bosom to be indistinctly visible, the old reptile was encouraged to wriggle himself into a chair just behind, whence he hissed over her shoulder at her, and she sipped the venom with a smile.

"Where has everybody been all the morning?" began Mrs. Bailey. "Really, Mr. Carton, you are all of you very ungallant. Here have we three ladies been alone for the last two hours, and nobody has come near us! Because Mr. Stourton has sprained his ankle or wrist, and Colonel Ethe-

ridge is under strict surveillance, I don't see why we are all to be moped to death. I wanted some one to walk in the home-park when the rain left off, and couldn't find any one. Then I went into the billiard-room, but you'd all hid yourselves away somewhere—in the kennel or stables, I believe. I'm not surprised at some: there's Mr. Granfield, I know, is not a lady's man—don't think us worth talking to! (Beg your pardon, Lady Granfield, but it's true, isn't it?) I did, however, expect better from *you*, Mr. Carton, with all your pretended admiration for the fair sex. I don't believe a word of it. I believe you're just as bad as any of them, and care more for your horrid *Times* and your cigars than you do for our society."

It was during this long peroration, delivered with a seductive, pouting languor, over a morsel of *broderie Anglaise* which her white fingers held, that Carton felt himself encouraged to draw his chair in, close behind the fair worker.

"I'm too flattered that you should miss me, Mrs. Bailey, even for half an hour, 'pon my soul, I am, and if I'd known you were here alone, why

I should have flown here, of course, on the wings of the wind, though my time, as you know, is not my own. I've only four more mornings to get through a vast deal of work in. Still, you know, at Venus's call, Mrs. Bailey, eh? so enthusiastic a slave as myself *must* have responded, let the consequences be what they might to the country! Lord Handerstone expects an exposition of certain facts from me by the end of the week, but, God bless my soul! when a lovely woman lays her commands on me—ah! it is not the *first* time by many, that business has gone to the wall with me, for the sake of a charming woman's smile."

Venus simpered, and shook that loose tiresome curl which was always getting in her way a little further back—not so far as to prevent its falling gradually into its original position, however.

"But you have generally such a crowd of young and comely aspirants for those smiles," continued the Thersites beside her, with a leer, "that I did not think there was a hope of finding you

disengaged. Where is your handsome squire, Wilmot?"

"That boy?" said the lady, raising her eyebrows with a look of innocent astonishment; "oh, poor creature! he has had to go back to his school, no, I mean his regiment, this morning, to try and persuade them to give him a holiday next week instead of this, on account of these horrid plays, which turn everything upside down. I wish Mr. Stourton had never thought of them. They have quite destroyed all one's comfort here, this time; and now, after all, we shall be gone before they take place."

"If the idea of them is so horrid," said Lady Granfield, smiling over her spectacles, "I should think you would be glad to escape them."

"Why don't you act, Mrs. Bailey?" asked Miss Skipton, with sudden alacrity. "Then you wouldn't find the plays horrid, but very amusing; only rather *nervous*," she continued, shaking her head; "yes! I must confess it makes one a little nervous."

"Oh! I have no talent for acting," replied

Mrs. Bailey, with edifying simplicity. "It is all very well for those who have, like yourself, but *I* never could act, even in private life; I should be frightened to death, and not know what to do, and make all sorts of mistakes."

"'Look in her face and you'll forget them all,'" murmured Carton.

"No one would think *you* were nervous, Mrs. Bailey," said Miss Skipton, with some spirit, for she felt the rudeness of the other's covert sarcasm. "I am told yesterday you showed such wonderful courage, and wanted to go where no one else would, and—at all events, standing up to repeat a few words is nothing in the way of courage to endangering one's neck in a river."

"There is no accounting for nervousness," said Lady Granfield, with the amiable wish of throwing oil on waters which she perceived were troubling; "one thing makes one person nervous, and another, another."

"That reminds me of what a woman once said to me," sniggled Carton. "Gad! a beautiful woman she was, too—the Duchesse de Pont

l'Evêque. She declared it always made her nervous to pull off her stockings in the dark. Of course I offered to assist her, *en plein jour*, whenever she liked—he ! he ! he !—nervousness is only want of habit, I assure you nothing else. Why, there was Gadfly, when he made his first speech in the House,—I remember it as if it were yesterday—he was twitching all over, quite inaudible, I give you my word! And yet, look what a speaker he has become! Habit, nothing but habit."

Enter Lady Trevelyan, with some camelias in her hand.

"How is the invalid?" asks Mrs. Bailey, smiling.

"Oh, he is going on very well, if we can only persuade him to remain quiet."

"I shouldn't think it would require much persuasion, if you pay Mrs. Faulconbridge so much a day to rehearse with him. He seemed quite happy when I passed through the library a couple of hours ago. I saw I was *de trop*, so wouldn't stay."

"I think we are all *de trop* when any rehearsal is going on," said Lady Trevelyan, quietly, and she began arranging her camelias in a vase.

"I never saw such a regular specimen of *the actress*," continued Mrs. Bailey, in a grave ruminating way, with her attention absorbed in her work, to all appearance. "Very finished acting, I allow, but really those airs of extreme innocence and simplicity—that sweet habit of blushing at the first word one says to her—and then the way she goes on, all the time! It is, I suppose, not uncommon in the *demi-monde*, but in society one never meets with anything like it; now, does one, Lady Trevelyan?"

Had Lady Trevelyan not been appealed to, it is probable she would have allowed Mrs. Bailey to have run on as she liked, uncontradicted. Her own mind was disturbed just then by some painful thoughts. But she was too generous not to reply when thus addressed, as her sense of justice dictated.

"Mrs. Faulconbridge seems to me to be the very reverse of what you understand by *an actress*.

She is more like a child; a bright, enthusiastic, sensitive child; timid and impressionable; but quite unoccupied in thinking of herself and the effect she makes. Her excessive shyness, I should have thought, must interfere with her acting—it certainly must with her happiness."

"I should think you need have no fears on that score," laughed Carton. "Whether the *husband* is quite as happy under the circumstances may be doubtful. It reminds me of a story that——"

Lady Trevelyan looked at him as Medusa might have done.

"We will waive that story, Mr. Carton. You know of old I don't appreciate that kind of anecdote. Mr. Faulconbridge can take good care of himself, I am sure. But reputations have been whispered away, before now, by jokes such as yours, so I had rather not hear them."

Of course Carton laughed, and declared, 'pon his honour, that he didn't mean anything, and that the young Roscius was too handsome a fellow not to find favour in the eyes of all the ladies, and a great deal besides, which didn't

prevent every member of that small party from feeling that he, Carton, had been remarkably well snubbed.

"So glad, dear," whispered Miss Skipton, who was close beside Lady Trevelyan; "so glad you stopped that horrid, slanderous man, in your own sweet, dignified way. So nice of you, dear, it was."

There was a pause. It was broken by the benevolent Lady Granfield.

"The glass has risen, I declare!" she remarked, tapping the aneroid that hung near her. The effort to divert the current of conversation was praiseworthy, but almost too palpable.

"Why, it has been fine for the last two hours, Lady Granfield!" exclaimed Mrs. Bailey; "fine enough to allow of Lady Katherine's dragging that poor wretched man all among the dripping shrubberies, by way of looking sentimental. Sentiment in goloshes!"

"Why not?" asked Lady Trevelyan. "I was not aware that sentiment depended on the sort of shoes one wore."

"As long as Love has put his foot in it, eh? He! he! he! He's always got his foot in it, always!" and this jest afforded Mr. Carton such satisfaction that he at once regained his equilibrium.

"Poor dear Lady Katherine!" sighed Mrs. Bailey. "It really is such a relief to think she is going to be settled at last. One has got so tired of seeing her season after season, making such desperate efforts, all to no purpose, and getting more hard and angular every year, poor dear!"

"She had kept herself rather too long in racing condition," said Carton. "She'll fatten up, now that she is turned out to grass, and has an easy life of it. She has entered for too many stakes every season, and that doesn't pay. Here she had all the running to herself, and so she won in a canter."

"Good gracious, Mr. Carton!" laughed Mrs. Bailey. "You must have been studying *Bell's Life;* I shouldn't have expected all the phraseology of the turf from you."

"Thorough-bred," said good old Lady Granfield, smiling over her spectacles. She really thought she was perpetrating a joke. "Katherine is thorough-bred: that's it."

"Yes. It's plebeian to have flesh on one's bones, I believe," tittered Mrs. Bailey. "You and I, Lady Trevelyan, should have no chance in a race against Lady Katherine. We don't show breeding as she does—by our bones."

"Racing was never much in my line," replied the other, with a quiet smile; "and now I am much too old to think of running *any* sort of race."

"And you, Mrs. Bailey," said the gallant Carton, laying a skinny hand on his waistcoat, some inches above the left-hand pocket; "and you, Mrs. Bailey—ha! we see it all now! You, knowing you would be victorious in every race, have magnanimously *scratched yourself*."

"Turf phraseology again, Mr. Carton," laughed the little lady. "We shall hear of you belonging to the Jockey Club before long. I'm sure I'm such a fright with these scratches, that I should

not have given myself them, if I could have helped it. It was all Mr. Stourton's fault; or rather Mrs. Faulconbridge's, who can't ride, and of *course* he wouldn't leave her. If he'd given me a lead, old Highflyer would never have made a mistake, and I should never have been the object I am now. Of course, I'm dreadfully sorry about Mr. Stourton; but I can't help feeling it was all his own fault."

This was rather too much, even for Lady Trevelyan. As to Miss Skipton, she became greatly agitated over her tapestry, and drew out her needle sharply, ejaculating between her teeth:

"Well! I never *did*——"

"I think when an accident has happened," said Lady Trevelyan, "there is very little use in talking over whose fault it was. Generally people's opinions differ on that point. I am *sure* you must be very sorry that George is suffering," (she hesitated whether she should say, "on your account," but she only added:) "we must all be thankful, however, that it is no worse."

"Indeed, we must," chimed in Miss Skipton,

shaking her head, as who should say, "How would you like to have had his death at your door, ma'am?"

"Accidents are really sometimes very curious. I was going down by the South-Western, to Lord Handerstone's last winter——"

"Luncheon is on the table, my lady."

What Mr. Carton's experiences had been on his way to Lord Handerstone's last winter was lost to his auditors on their passage to the dining-room, upon this occasion. But you may be sure that, individually and collectively, they all came in for it more than once during Carton's stay. It was one slight drawback to his agreeability that he was apt to repeat himself. He thought you could not have too much of a good thing: and his things were so very good. Another slight drawback was that, under no possible contingency, could he talk to you for ten minutes without introducing Lord Handerstone's name.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CHEQUERED YOUTH.

LADY GRANFIELD'S aneroid was right. The afternoon turned out fine, and every one walked or drove, according to their inclination. Miss Skipton and Mrs. Faulconbridge were seen issuing, with kilted petticoats for a long and probably muddy walk, by one gate; Mrs. Bailey and one or two men by another. The old ladies drove; the old gentlemen strolled down to inspect some new farm buildings of Sir Richard's.

"You seem to take very little exercise, Lady Trevelyan," said Faulconbridge. He had followed her into the conservatory, where she was snipping off a few dead leaves into her basket, while her garden-hat hung on her arm. "Do you never walk?"

"Sometimes; but seldom beyond the park when I am here. I have the weakness of my sex in fancying that the surveillance of a woman's eye is of use, particularly in a garden. Sir Richard lets me give my own orders when I am here, and the gardeners know what an interest I take in everything, and exert themselves accordingly; whereas, when they are left to themselves, things look very different. My uncle has ten gardeners, and gives large wages, but he neither knows nor cares anything about flowers, and the consequence is, that my own little garden, with two men and a boy, has always earlier peas, finer strawberries, and more abundant flowers. There is a gardening homily for you, Mr. Faulconbridge!"

"Won't you take a short walk in the home-park?"

"Not to-day. I am going back to George presently. Mr. Granfield is with him now; but I suppose he will be going out before long, and I don't like the boy being left alone: he will be getting fidgety, and want to walk about."

"Why do you call him a boy? He is one-and-twenty. There is not more than two years difference between us."

Lady Trevelyan looked at him, and smiled. Perhaps she thought it not unlikely that she might have applied such a term to *him* also, had they been on more intimate terms.

"I am always accustomed to think of George as a boy,—and so, I am afraid, I shall go on doing. He has still so much of the boy's nature about him—enthusiastic and impetuous. What is called 'worldly wisdom,' and which, I suppose, ought to come with years, is the death of all that. It is a very disenchanting possession. It turns all the gold to lead."

"Some people never have had any gold to turn," said Edgar, gloomily.

"Then they must devote their energies to turning the lead around them into gold, eh?" she said, with a smile.

"Yes; the lead *may* be turned into gold." He walked away from her, to the farther end of the conservatory, and began picking some

orange-leaves. Then he turned round in his sudden way, and said,—

"I will go and sit with Stourton,—that is to say, if you think he would like it."

Now Lady Trevelyan was placed in an awkward position: inasmuch as she had her own reasons for thinking that George would *not* particularly like it. He had declared to her that Faulconbridge seemed to him to be a clever man; and a very useful man he was, no doubt, in these theatrical arrangements: in fact, it was not possible to overrate his merits in this respect:—"But," he added, "my dear Di, I confess to you, I can't make the fellow out. I never feel quite at my ease with him, and you know *that's* not a common complaint with me. I pity that sweet little wife of his. She must have a hard time of it, I fancy, with such a queer-tempered fellow as he seems."

No wonder Lady Trevelyan hesitated to vouch for her cousin's gratification from the proposed *tête-à-tête*. It seemed kindly meant, however, and she thought it would do the sick man on

his sofa no harm to go through a short course of endurance.

"Let us come in and see him," she said, "and then I will leave you."

They found George alone, Granfield having just left him. He looked a little pale, and seemed rather cross and fidgety, as Lady Trevelyan had foreseen would probably be the case. Nor did his countenance brighten much when he saw the visitor she had brought with her. But she did not relent: she left them together, and when she returned to the room, half an hour later, she was as much pleased as surprised to find George so absorbed in his companion's conversation that he hardly noticed her entrance. She stole away, and an hour later, when it was getting dusk, she ventured back again. George was still in the same attitude, listening, with an animated face, to Faulconbridge.

"Come here, Di. Come and listen to this. Don't go away."

She said nothing, but sat down; while Faulconbridge exclaimed, half laughingly, half sadly,—

"Lady Trevelyan would not thank you for inflicting on her the ugly stories of a man's vicissitudes who is next door to a beggar. I was only trying to amuse Stourton by telling him of some of my experiences in search of a living."

"What has interested George would, I think, interest me," said Lady Trevelyan.

"He has been telling me about a German scoundrel who cheated him out of a lot of money, and how he pinked him in a duel."

"I had rather not hear that," his cousin replied, gently.

"It's as good as a novel—and about that Russian woman, Faulconbridge? My dear Di, you don't know what you've missed. I never heard anything so interesting. Go on, there's a good fellow. When you found yourself cleaned out, what did you do?"

"Oh! it's a long story," laughed Faulconbridge, somewhat bitterly,—"a very long story, belonging to my student-days. My debts, and scrapes, and miseries,—they wouldn't amuse Lady

Trevelyan. I got back into Italy at last, and I then took to writing for one of the papers in Turin. The pay was small, but it enabled me to live until my poor grandmother died, and other troubles came on me. The lead has predominated over the gold in my twenty-three years of life, Lady Trevelyan."

Every woman ought to be a little curious. The one he addressed was not altogether without that virtue. She had been burning to say something, which she felt herself now emboldened to do.

"What would interest me more than anything —more than all Mr. Faulconbridge's experiences of rascality—would be to hear of his earlier life in Italy; of his mother and his childhood. I never feel I know any one *well*, till I know something of their first associations. You have spoken of Italy, and of your grandmother, and therefore I venture to say this, Mr. Faulconbridge; but I should be sorry for you to do anything that is painful to yourself. Only as George wished me to listen to your personal adventures," she added, with a smile, "I thought it fair to tell you that

those of your very early days, before you knew anything of Russian countesses and German scoundrels, would please me best."

For half a minute—scarcely more—he appeared to hesitate—to be balancing certain considerations in his mind; and then he spoke. George probably anticipated rather a slow business: the journey backwards from adolescence to childhood promised to be less amusing than the racy narrative he had been listening to.

"I am more than half Italian, though I call myself English," Faulconbridge began. "My father's mother was a Tuscan by birth, and my father himself, when little more than a boy, married a Neapolitan lady: but she died when I was quite a child. I can just remember her when we lived at Castellamare. She was a true Southern, and never, I believe, learnt to speak a word of English. It was my father's wish, on the other hand, and my grandmother's, too, that I should be brought up as like an English boy as possible, notwithstanding that circumstances obliged us to live in Italy. My father always

talked English at home, went to the English Protestant church, read chiefly English books. We resided with my grandmother, who had formerly been on the stage, and who still kept up some intercourse with certain artists of talent whom she had known in her youth. Thus my attention was very early directed to the subject of dramatic literature, and my taste formed by reading only the very best authors, while I had opportunities of seeing also the best actors of the day. My father was a man of great ability. He undertook my education entirely himself; and though I never did justice to the pains he took, I may say that nearly all I know I owe to him. But his health — which had been such as to prevent his ever following up any profession, though he occasionally occupied himself in literary pursuits — gave way at last, I am afraid greatly owing to his devoted attention to my studies. I had never known him otherwise than as an invalid; but when I was about fifteen he became much worse, and in less than two years after that he died.

"It would be difficult to describe to you the position in which we three stood towards each other; for in England—this land of mere conventional family attachments (if I may use the term)—those passionate ties seldom, I suppose, if ever, exist. If my father was devoted to me, he was scarcely less so to his own mother: and my life, boy as I was, was bound up in those two. My grandmother was more than my own mother, probably, could ever have been to me. She was not the indulgent, doting old woman a grandmother so often is. She was my father's counsellor and helpmate in my education, to whose decisions, not only his heart, but his judgment still bowed: a gifted woman, whose nature had been tried and strengthened by suffering, and who, to a woman's tenderness, united a man's fortitude and energy.

"She had, through poverty and other still more cruel difficulties, contrived that my father should receive the best education himself; and now that she was no longer able to earn large sums, she reaped a double satisfaction from all the early

sacrifices she had made, in the education which he was enabled to give me. For some years, indeed, of my childhood, she used to give lessons in singing and dramatic elocution. That was when we lived at Rome."

"You did not live then always at Castellamare?" said Lady Trevelyan.

"No; after my mother's death we left it, and went to Rome; but the summers there never agreed with my father; and moving every six months was expensive. Besides, there were other drawbacks to a residence in Rome, consequent on the number of its English visitors; but on these it is unnecessary for me to touch. We remained there three years altogether."

"And where did you live after that?"

"Chiefly at Lucca, my grandmother's birthplace, and where a small house was left her. This was a help to us, for we were very poor, and my grandmother was getting too old to give lessons, even if Lucca had not been the dull and poorly inhabited town it is. It was there my father died."

"And you were then only sixteen, Mr. Faulconbridge?"

"Only sixteen: and the loss to a boy at that age can never be estimated! He was unlike me in every respect. I should have been a better, certainly a *different*, man had he lived. His character may be summed up in three words — endurance, resignation, forgiveness. As yet, I have only taught myself the first of these lessons, and that but indifferently. My father early implanted in me a strong sense and love of *justice*. This, combined with my passionate nature, so different to his calm and gentle one, made it impossible to submit tamely to what my father endured."

He had spoken vehemently, and now he paused. Lady Trevelyan was not the woman to fill the interval with some commonplace moral saw. She was silent. But she felt none the less deeply interested in what the young man was saying; and her face, probably, told him this better than words could have done. It was her, and her only he was now addressing; for her that he had consented

to the painful task of speaking of gone-by times, and towards her that he turned as he told his tale. Not that he had forgotten George's presence. After weighing all the consequences, he had arrived at the resolution of disclosing certain portions of his past history in Stourton's presence; but he was not his chief auditor. He could hardly have told as much as he did, and have thrown so much of his impassioned self into the narration, had it been into George's ear alone; for, in touching the minor chords of suffering, the speaker could not anticipate much sympathy from the heart of a young man whose life hitherto had been one unclouded smile. And yet, as he proceeded, George looked more and more interested; his chin on his clenched left hand, his brows knit above the light blue eyes, which he never removed from Edgar Faulconbridge's face. He had been noisy enough, with his questions and his laughter, during the narration of those later passages in Edgar's life; but now he was silent. And yet Faulconbridge knew that George was listening to him with absorbed attention.

After the pause of something less than a minute he went on.

"My father's death was a blow from which my grandmother never really recovered, though she survived him nearly six years; but she was never the same after his death. Very shortly after that sad blank was made in our home, Fortune, most unexpectedly, did us a good turn, or *seemed* to do so, for the result, I fear, hardly proved it to have been such. I had not seen my mother's father since I was five years old. He always lived at Naples, and was reputed to be very poor. Certainly, my father had not a *carlino* with his wife when he married; and yet she was an only child. But now, when news reached us of my maternal grandfather's death, we learned also, to our great astonishment, that he had left to me, his only grandson, a sum nearly amounting to a thousand pounds in English money — the savings of a penurious life. That may sound a small sum to you; to me it seemed an inexhaustible fortune, I remember, when my grandmother told me of it. This legacy wrought a change in all our plans; I

ought, perhaps, to say, my grandmother's, but, boy as I was, at my father's death, she discussed most affairs openly with me after that event, and made me already think and act in a measure for myself.

"It had been my father's desire that I should receive such an education as might fit me to take a situation as tutor to some wealthy young Englishman, eventually. He thought such an opening, besides securing to me a moderate income while it lasted, might be the means of leading to some permanent employment. My own inclinations pointed all along to the stage; and I think my grandmother, seeing that this inclination was so strong, would not have opposed it, had not my father himself so urgently wished me to adopt what he considered a less precarious means of livelihood. After his death, I need hardly say that all his wishes seemed sacred in my eyes. Though I looked forward with extreme repugnance to becoming a humble dependent in a great family, which I was perfectly aware is often the position of a tutor, I prepared myself with-

out any urging on my grandmother's part, to follow out my poor father's plans in furtherance of this object. I had not then been tried, and I miscalculated my own strength. Not by pride only—by temperament and everything else I was entirely unfitted for such a position; but I didn't know myself then.

"I believe I know more of classics than many men who have taken high honours at the English Universities. My father and I used to read some of the most difficult of the Greek and Latin poets, till I became as intimate with them as with Dante and Shakspeare; and he led me up to a certain point in mathematics, where I stuck, and could never get any further. This, probably, would have been enough to have enabled me to stick B.A. or M.A., or some other imposing combination of letters after my name, had I been at Oxford. As it was, I had nothing to show—no testimonials, school-prizes, or anything else to vouch for my acquirements. It seemed desirable that I should go to some college for a while to gain such; for, without interest or recommenda-

tion, how could I hope to obtain a situation? It was just then we heard of my grandfather's legacy. My grandmother at once suggested that I should go to a German University. 'You will learn the language,' she said, 'which is now a very necessary acquisition; and you will have greater advantages there for completing your education than you would have at an Italian college. Of course, I cannot go with you; but it is only parting with you a little sooner. It must have come before long.' So it was arranged that I was to go, and I went."

"Poor old lady! How she must have felt it, losing you so soon after she had lost your father. It was really heroic, her sending you so far away from her," said Lady Trevelyan.

"*I* had reason enough to regret it," he said, gloomily; "for, except learning German, and making the acquaintance of Ferrers (and he only remained at Bonn a very short time), I did very little good there. I have said that my grandmother talked to me unreservedly of our prospects—of the present and the future; but of the *past* she

never spoke. I have sometimes thought that if—but no! I will not attempt to excuse myself: my life at college was unworthy the son of my father. I was young, and had been very strictly brought up. I found myself suddenly thrown into the midst of every kind of temptation; and the fatal facility with which I acquired what cost most of my companions hard study, helped to lead me into idle and dissolute habits. I was not a boy who was likely to do things by halves. '*Facilis descensus.*' My vanity yielded to the temptation of belonging to a fast-club, which numbered among its members half the 'swells' of the University; and I soon got into the way of its nightly suppers, its drinking, gambling, duelling, and all the rest of it. At the end of the first year, I was heavily in debt; and I had grown reckless. I was ashamed to tell my poor grandmother; but it wasn't the right kind of shame. Two terms had now passed without my leaving the University, while most of the other students went home, or took their walking tours, and I had not money to carry me across the Alps! During this vacation, when I

was most miserable and desponding, I more than once took pen in hand to write to Ferrers (who was gone long before that), and to tell him what was weighing on my mind. Had my pride allowed me to do so, things might have turned out differently. But I was fool enough to go to a Jew, who, on the security of some of my so-called 'friends,' lent me the money requisite to pay my debts of honour. I needn't tell you how suicidal such a step was. When the bill became due, I was, of course, in a much worse plight than ever. I owed the Jew nearly four hundred pounds. I had, moreover, in a frenzy of desperation, gambled again, with the hope of retrieving my position, and lost nearly as much as my original debt.

"You wonder why I tell you all this, Lady Trevelyan. These are not the details you wanted to hear: I have left the innocent days of childhood behind me, and got under influences you had rather not hear of. Well, this was my *real* education—that is all I have to say. I touch on it as lightly as possible, but out of the self-abasement, the bitter reproach of that time, I

arose another man. Other circumstances again, later, hardened and sharpened me; but my eyes were opened to the knowledge of good and evil in those days.

"When I thought of the grief and trouble I should cause my good old grandmother, I was nearly mad. I hated myself; I hated all my companions, who were, God knows, less to blame than myself, inasmuch as they were all brought up in habits of extravagance, and had never had such a father—such a home as mine.

"I had to tell her at last. I wonder I didn't throw myself into the Rhine, when it came to writing that letter! I had to tell her that nearly the whole of my uncle's legacy was gone—(was owing at least by me; for the money was in her hands): I had to tell her that this was the termination of all her hopes for my distinction—I was a ruined man. As to my future career, how was it possible I could ever be chosen as a guide and guardian of others—I, who had signally failed to guard myself from the vulgarest pitfalls of college life?

"I have never known any agony—(I hope such falls to the lot of few)—comparable to the shame, the anguish, and the suspense with which I awaited her reply. It was in her power to refuse to pay this money—at least, till I came of age. But this I was confident she would not do. Far more concerned was I to know how she would receive the terrible blow: whether it might not kill her; whether the pure, high-minded old lady would utterly repudiate me, who had disappointed all her fondest hopes. Her answer came quick as the return post would bring it. Every word of that letter is engraven on my heart. She said nothing of the bitter sorrow to herself: love and compassion for me, the desire, above all, that I should not lose every grain of self-respect—this was the whole spirit of her letter. 'For the money itself, my boy,' she wrote, 'don't waste your time in grieving. After all, you are no worse off than before your grandfather left it you; and being again dependent on your brains and energy alone, will work, I am confident, with redoubled zeal to gain for yourself a livelihood.'

"I cried like a child over her letter—I am not ashamed to own it. Of course my remaining at the university was out of the question. My debts were all paid, but I was little better than a beggar. I sold everything I couldn't carry on my back, and walked with my knapsack back into Italy. I had a friend at Turin, and I stopped there. He got me the employment there I spoke of—that of writing for one of the daily papers. I then begged my grandmother to sell her house if she could, and join me, as I was able now at all events to support myself. She did so, and found at Turin some of her old artist friends of other days. That was how I came to think of the stage again. The pay I got as a writer was small: I knew what talents I had were better adapted to the stage; and I heard of actors receiving large salaries. I began by devoting some hours every night, in secret, to the study; and after many months I communicated my wishes to my grandmother.

"But, at her urgent solicitation, I did not yet give up the certainty of a slender income for the

smiles of a capricious public. I had made up my mind to appear first in Italy, to make a name for myself there, before I attempted to act in England; for I had never even seen an English play, though I knew my Shakspeare, and Beaumont and Fletcher, and Massinger by heart. But I must make my reputation in Alfieri, she said. We used to rehearse a scene or two every night, my grandmother reading one of the parts herself. Those evenings, however—destined, perhaps, to be the happiest of my life—were numbered, alas! My grandmother, whose health had been slowly undermined, was suddenly stricken down, and, after lingering a few months, died in my arms."

"You must have felt thankful," said Lady Trevelyan, in a low voice, "that it did not happen when—when you were away."

"I only know my heart rebelled against the decree. I am afraid I was thankful for nothing," he replied, in a hoarse voice. "And then when I learnt, as I did first upon her death-bed, *all* that she had suffered and forgiven; the long martyrdom her life had been——" He broke off

abruptly, exclaiming, "If there ever was a saint on earth, that woman was one!"

"And after your grandmother's death, what did you do? Did you leave Italy at once?"

"Very soon after; but the history of my *education*, Lady Trevelyan, ends there," he said, with an altered and, as it seemed to her, a constrained manner. "Such as I am, the circumstances you have now heard, have chiefly tended to make me. To have stopped at my childhood would have given you but a slight indication of the influences under which my character was formed. I have carried you up to a point beyond which I cannot go. Immediately after my grandmother's death, I entered upon a new phase of my life—with new duties—new responsibilities."

"Ah!" exclaimed Lady Trevelyan, with an involuntary start. "Of course—to be sure—you married. How long ago was that?"

"Just six months."

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE FALLING SHADOWS.

MR. MILLET entered, followed by a footman bearing the tray of afternoon tea.

It had grown so dark that faces were no longer distinguishable. Some one came in: a tall figure with a heavy tread, and approached George's sofa.

"Who is that?" said Lady Trevelyan.

"It's me, Diana."

The grammar was everybody's, but the voice was Sir Richard's—and Sir Richard's alone.

"How d'ye feel this evening, Georgey?" He sat himself down heavily in a chair, and took out his snuff-box.

"Oh! fresh as a two-year-old, uncle Dick. I'm thinking of offering to ride in the Grand Military Steeple-chase on Saturday, sir."

He had not shaken off the impression of

Faulconbridge's story; and the attempt to answer Sir Richard in his ordinary style was somewhat forced.

"Gad! you madcap!" said his uncle. "I believe we shall have to put a strait waistcoat on you, if you're to be kept on that sofa for a week."

Then followed a sound which told that Sir Richard was taking a pinch of snuff; after which, in laying his box down on the table, his hand encountered the tea-tray. Sir Richard always waged war against this barbarous innovation on the habits of his day, and always affected extreme surprise on every fresh occasion that he saw a teacup before dinner.

"God bless my soul! What's this? Tea? *Tea* at this hour! You don't mean to say, Georgey, that you're taking to that absurd habit—only fit for women? Destroy your appetite for dinner—injure your digestion. If you must take anything have a glass of sherry and bitters. Not that *I* ever require anything from breakfast to dinner. It wasn't the fashion of my time to be eating all day long."

"Only to drink all night long?" said George, laughing.

"Ay, George, a gentleman then wasn't afraid of his couple of bottles or so. You young men now are such a set of mollycoddles, you want to be off to the ladies after a couple of glasses."

"You see, uncle Dick," said George, with mock humility, "I'm ashamed to own it—it's a shocking horrid vice, I know, but I'm fond of my cup of tea."

"Pshaw!" said Sir Richard, with a lofty good-humour. "Don't chaff your uncle, sir! Diana, where are you? Impossible to see a soul in this Trophonius's cave of yours. That is another ridiculous custom: not to have lights as soon as it gets dark. What is the use of sitting like so many ghosts there? Why don't you ring for a lamp?"

"Those last rays of sunset are so beautiful from this window," said his niece. "It seems a pity to shut them out. Besides, no one ever does anything at this hour."

"And that is such a blessing," chimed in George. "It is the only time of the day one sits

down without a fidgety desire to get up and do something else."

"I didn't know, Master George," observed his uncle, "there was ever one hour in the twenty-four when you were free from that affliction—ha! ha!—except, by-the-by, when you're sitting by a pretty woman. Is there any one else here, Diana? Do I see some one opposite there, in the arm-chair?"

"It is Mr. Faulconbridge, uncle."

"Oh!"

There was a formality in the way that interjection was exhaled—a perceptible change at once in the baronet's manner. Those jokes and sportive family ways were not for such as the "young man who is down here, you know, to superintend the plays, and so forth."

"I am glad to find from my nephew that this *congtre-tong*, Mr. Faulconbridge, will not deprive him and the company in general of your services—very valuable, I am sure—for these plays. You haven't any—a—engagement, I presume, as yet, at a London theatre?"

"No, I have not, sir. Like Ravensworth, 'I bide my time!'"

Sir Richard coughed.

"The theatres are sadly changed since my day. I remember the time when the stage was supported by the first people in the land. What a galaxy of talent there was then! Betterton—the Kembles—Mrs. Siddons! I seldom enter a theatre now—the low buffoonery, and then the audience! Even the Opera. When I think what the pit of the Opera was in my day. Fop's Alley is gone! Now there is only a mass of tailors and bootmakers, who push and elbow you. By Gad! it's intolerable!"

"Yes," said George, "the pit of the Opera resembles, in one particular, that bottomless pit, where so much gnashing of teeth goes on."

"I wonder, sir, you should *ever* be able to enter the Opera House now," said Faulconbridge. "Those who have retentive memories generally have reminiscences of their youth which interfere with their enjoyment of the present. Fortunately for *us*, every one is not so stored

with recollections of departed excellence—or the theatres would be empty."

"'Twould be no great loss if they were, in their present state. I hope, sir, you mean to do something to raise the tone of things. The Elizabethan drama has utterly departed. No such thing as a five-act tragedy in blank verse is ever given now, I believe. A few enterprising persons, who are fond of low, *very* low, wit, go down to some place in the Strand, where they sit jammed in a vice they call a stall, and listen to a vulgar set of dogs in a burlesque, and that's what they call 'going to the theatre' in the present day!"

"You wouldn't call it going to chapel, sir?" said George.

The door opened at that moment, and the figures of two ladies loomed in the dusk.

"We thought we should find some one here," said Miss Skipton's brisk voice, "and tea going on, I declare! We have had *such* a walk. Is Lady Trevelyan here? because it's impossible to tell. Mrs. Faulconbridge and I are *so* tired—a cup of

tea, please. Gracious! Mr. Faulconbridge, I beg your pardon! I was going to sit down, not seeing your knee. It really is so dark."

"Of course it is," said Sir Richard's pompous voice, out of the darkness, "I wonder you don't all tumble over each other. Miss Skipton, I thought you were a woman of more sense than to drink slops at this hour."

"We must make some *more* slops for her, I see," laughed Lady Trevelyan, "for we have drained the tea-pot. Mr. Faulconbridge, if you can find the silver tea-box anywhere on the table, you may empty it in here, and put in some water. Uncle Richard, I want to speak to you before you go; I see you are going to depart—just come to the window with me for a moment."

She took his arm, and led him into the embrasure of a window, where, in a discreet undertone, she continued,—

"I want you to ask Mrs. Whitehed and her daughter here. It will be much more convenient for the rehearsals, and they are so good-natured about acting. The Baileys and others will not

stay beyond Monday; there will be plenty of room."

"I have never done more than ask them to the Christmas ball. It is opening the door to all sorts of things; I don't like it, Diana."

"But you—or George, which is the same thing—are under an obligation to these people. You can't help acknowledging it in some way."

"Oh! as to that, they're flattered enough at being mixed up in the thing at all—gives them a certain importance in the county, and so forth. The father, you know, was a wholesale grocer, or something, in the city. Still, you know, for *once*, I shouldn't object, if there wasn't a daughter in the case. Girls are the very deuce; you know how I object to them in general. If Lichfield could have brought *his* daughter, now, I should have been vastly pleased, but they're engaged this week unfortunately. One can't be too particular, Diana, *whom* one asks to the house, just now."

"If you mean relative to George," said his niece, smiling, "you need really have no fears: Miss Whitehed is not in the slightest

degree attractive, and George is much too fastidious."

"Oh! that's all very well, but I haven't lived in the world without knowing that there's no trusting to *that*, Diana. A woman may be as ugly as sin, and a fellow will unaccountably find something about her. Gad! there's *no* accounting for those things."

"If there were no one else here—if we were quite alone," said Lady Trevelyan, with some little hesitation, "I might, perhaps, agree with you that it was better not to give a boy, with nothing in the world to do, the temptation of talking nonsense to *any* girl; but, with three or four other young women in the house, I think I can promise you that George will not be engrossed by Miss Whitehed."

"Because the young dog amuses himself with the actress, eh? Of course, I see it all, Diana: I watch him closely, you may depend on it. But to tell you the truth, I am better pleased that he should amuse himself in that way for a time, *pour passer le tong*, you know, than that he should

be flirting with any girl whom I could never hear of his marrying. No saying how soon a fellow may be caught. Gad!" he murmured to himself, "I know *that* pretty well."

"Then," said Lady Trevelyan, returning valiantly to the charge, and wisely leaving that other collateral question unnoticed; "then you do not object to inviting these people, uncle Richard, if only for three or four days, do you? At the first symptom of danger, I will undertake that they shall disappear. You really need be under no apprehension."

"Well! if it must be so——"

Here Sir Richard was interrupted by something that nearly approached a shriek from Miss Skipton.

"Oh! oh!—ugh! Gracious goodness! what on earth is there in this tea? Oh! of all the horrible—horrible—ugh!"

Amid general exclamations of astonishment, enters Mr. Millet, with a lamp.

"By Jove!" shouted George, with a roar of laughter. "By Jove! Sir Richard, here's Faul-

conbridge has been and emptied your snuff-box into the tea-pot! Poor Miss Skipton!"

That was it. The empty silver snuff-box beside the tea-pot left it beyond all doubt. It was impossible for any one to help laughing. All gathered round the unfortunate sufferer, except Sir Richard, who, as he left the room, took occasion to say,—

"This comes of your drinking your slops at this hour, and sitting in the dark. I'm not the least surprised. I always told you how it would be!"

END OF VOL. I.

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